

# Variant

a magazine for new art and ideas

no.7 £2

ISSN 0954 8815



Alex Trocchi and Project Sigma  
Notes on Poland/The Orange Alternative  
Mail Art - The Eternal Network  
Opening Doors on Experimental Music  
FLUX/NOVUS  
De-classed Elements  
Stewart Home Interviewed  
Reclaim the City  
Radical Quotations  
Video into the 90's  
Erotic Films by Women  
IMMATERIAL MATERIAL

**VARIANT VIDEO and VARIANT AUDIO offers**

# Variant

a magazine for new art and ideas

## VARIANT VIDEO *the magnetic magazine*

A magazine on video tape produced as a compliment to  
Variant available through this issue in limited edition only

### **PART 1: "Video Art; the midnight of the decade". 75 mins duration**

#### **New Works by:**

Cavan Convery, Sarah Downes, Guy Carpenter, Andrew Smith, John Butler  
Jak Milroy, Justine Bretton, Jamie Russell, Ian Elliott,  
Garreth Roberts and Andrew Whiteford

#### **Interviews With:**

Jez Welsh, Willem Velthoven, Anna Ridley, Eddie Berg  
Simon Robertshaw, Michael Maziere, Mike Stubbs.

#### **Features on:**

Pictorial Heroes, Glasgow based video duo with interview and  
excerpts of their works.

### **Part 2: "Workers City; the subversive past". 45 mins duration.**

A documentary chronicling some ideas around radical Scottish  
working class history.

#### **Interviews with:**

Farquhar McLay, poet, editor of "the Voices of Dissent" and  
"Workers City" anthology of prose and writing  
subtitled 'the Real Glasgow Stands Up'.  
John Taylor Caldwell, archivist, biographer of Guy Aldred and  
author of "Come Dungeons Dark" recently  
published by Luath Press.  
James D. Young, historian and republican socialist, author of  
"The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class" and  
others. Recently working on major biography of  
Red Clydesider, John Maclean.  
Hamish Henderson, Folk collector, songwriter and founder of the  
School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University.  
Writer of such ballads as "Freedom Come All Ye"

PRICES - non-subscribers. VHS only for domestic use

Part 1 £20  
Part 2 £18  
Both for £35

Subscribers. VHS only for domestic use.

Part 1 £15  
Part 2 £13  
Both for £25

U-matic copies available for institutions. Write for details.

Variant Video was produced at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art  
in Dundee, Scotland. It was funded by the Student Production Fund there, and by Variant  
Magazine (Scottish Arts Council).

Co-produced by TV Workshop, Dundee and by Projects UK, Newcastle.

**76 Carlisle Street  
Glasgow G21 1EF  
Tel: 041-558 1877**



# CONTENTS

ISSN 0954 8815

## 7. EDITORIAL

### 8. EDITORIAL QUOTES

9. MAIL ART: THE ETERNAL NETWORK...  
...by Mark Pawson

13. BLEND AND CLASH: THEORIES OF DISCRETION  
...by Peter Suchin

19. INTERVIEW: STEWART HOME...  
...by Karen Goaman

24. POSTCARDS FROM POLAND...  
...by Lorna Waite

25. REVIEW: HERE AND NOW...  
...by Calum MacIntyre

30. ALEXANDER TROCCHI AND PROJECT SIGMA  
...by Howard Slater

38. REVIEW: DE-CLASSIFIED ELEMENTS VIDEOS  
...by Calum MacIntyre

42. VIEWS FROM THE THEME PARK...  
...by Doug Aubrey

46. 20 QUESTIONS, or: LEAVING THE C20TH  
...by Jez Welsh

50. TOWARDS A NEW EROTICA...  
...by Moira Sweeney

53. IMMATERIAL MATERIAL...  
...BY Dermot Todd

56. INTERVIEW: NOVUS...  
...by Malcolm Dickson

59. REVIEW: FLUX TAPES AND TEXT...  
...by Alastair Dickson

61. THE UNSEEN COLLECTION...  
...by William Clark

## ITEMS...

Centre pages by...Marion Coutts

Stickers by...Mark Pawson

Print by...Gordon Muir (limited)

Production and Editor :

Malcolm Dickson

Typeset and Printed by

Clydeside Press

(041 552 5519)

Assistant editor :

Lorna Waite

Commissioning editor :

Doug Aubrey

Deadline for issue 8

March 30th 1990

Distribution :

London by Counter-Distribution  
USA by Flatland Distribution  
Canada by Marginal Distribution  
Elsewhere by Variant Magazine.

Apologies to Milan Knizak for partisan appropriation of his  
hammer and sickle with lovehearts mail art piece.

Thanks to all who have supported this issue.

## VARIANT aims to:

document new areas of critical activity  
discuss this in a wider social and political context  
contribute to a multi-disciplinary approach to cultural activity

76 Carlisle Street

Glasgow G21 1EF

Tel: 041-558 1877



# EDITORIAL

Malcolm Dickson

This issue of Variant gives some coverage of little-known, yet purposeful project-orientated activities which involve collective participation in their production and reception. This flows through areas of magazine publishing, community video, music-making ventures, creative activity as non-merchandise - as in mail art, and in innovative approaches such as film and video which also create a critical discourse in their production. When a multitude of practices across a range of concerns link up with progressive ideas, then a critique and an engagement with the wider culture becomes practically operable.

It is necessary to assess the cultural consequences of media saturation, of 'leisure' based commodity culture, of the short-and-the-long-term forces which inebriate free-thought and marginalise 'meaningful' activity. In a time of the lumpen-intelligensia, of the lumpenised working-class, we hear much about the englobement of Capital with ever-more severe eco-political effects, and everyday violence in the media and in work and leisure situations further reinforces the power of a few over the destinies of the many. **"Self-determination is a key issue"** states a handout for an international even held in Glasgow in January 1990, **"not just in modern Scotland, but for all peoples at all points in history. How we determine our lives as individuals, and how power is determined between groups and interests in a society, is the stuff, not only of 'politics',**

★ **but of life itself."** Culture is the life of a people, and art is but one effect of that. The issue, as far as this magazine goes, is in creating a space in which to operate, of being able to negotiate things on your own terms, to build platforms to rally against prevailing orthodoxies, not least of all in being communicators of ideas and of spreading information.

Change begins from within, but only if it spills out, and only if the means it chooses to communicate and grow are self-determining. **"We wish to change things?"** asked Alexander Trocchi, **"Then we must think new and make it new. We must invent effective behavioural procedures which negate the status quo in form as well as in content. We must exploit loopholes in the system, underground ways of getting to the people and making them think. We have to remember at all times there is no personal enemy, that the 'only enemy' is non-personal : spiritual ignorance breeding fear, hysteria, schizophrenia."** Trocchi's radical blueprint of the mid-60's is now not so much out of date as under re-evaluation.

Serious cultural workers, like Trocchi before them, realise that there is an interlayering through issues of politics and history, aesthetics and theory, art and technology, cultural identity and media representation. However, it needs to be reasserted in our practices : as a challenge to the perpetrators of ignorance, the agents of intolerance, and to all those specialists who collect ideas like butterflies with the intention to kill that which is in full flight.



## A NOTE TO READERS

The clicking of politics and culture is further extended in this issue into a video supplement. Variant Video is available in 2 sections : "Video Art - the midnight of the decade" examines some ideas concerning the use of digital electronic images (video) as an artform, (as distinct from their commercial application). Several interviews are intercut with video works which illustrate the diversity and sophistication of video art. The 2nd section is a documentary titled "Workers City - the subversive past" and this involves interviews with 4 writers/thinkers/poets which attempts to fill in some gaps, or uncover some aspects of Scottish radical working class history. The videos are available in limited edition, with priority given to subscribers. Sales of the tape go towards paying for this printed issue, so it is non-profit making. Information is provided elsewhere in this issue on the contents and on prices.

The idea of the experimental magazine is extended into a C90 cassette titled "The Unseen Collection" which is available with this issue, another limited edition. It includes audio works by over 15 different individuals/groups (details provided further on in this issue). Apart from just being listened to, it is also intended to encourage future exchange and collaboration.

The next issue of Variant will include reviews of audio and video cassettes, and publications from a number of countries which are produced for reasons of quiet motivation, independence, curiosity, which have something to say, or which rely on networking. Those who send material will receive Variant in exchange. Inserted items are also welcome, whether they be prints, xeroxes, ephemeral items, drawings, in any number of multiples from between 50 to 1,500.

★ **"Self-Determination and Power"** event at the Pearce Institute in Govan, Glasgow, on 10th, 11th and 12th January 1990.



# EDITORIAL QUOTES

"There are new artistic and political connections being made between the media refusers, cultists, writers, artists, poets and pranksters who slip in and out of history, not least the free zone histories of the last twenty years. While it is not inevitable that a totally alternative consciousness will emerge from the crucible of intensifying alienation, there will be a fierce philosophical struggle during the next 11 years between the post-modernist and millenarian views of the world to match the eco-political struggles that will also occur."

Jon Savage "City 66/77/88/2000" printed in Vague no.21 1989

"We are like Gulliver lying stranded on the Lilliputian shore with every part of his body tied down; determined to free himself, he looks keenly around him: the smallest detail of the landscape, the smallest contour of the ground, the slightest movement, everything becomes a sign on which his escape may depend. The surest chances of liberation lie in what is most familiar. Was ever otherwise? Art, ethics, philosophy bear witness: under the crust of words and concepts, the living reality of non-adaptation to the world is always crouched ready to spring."

Raoul Vaneigem "The Revolution of Everyday Life" 1965, p.12, reprinted in 1983 by Rebel Press.

"The very failure of a utopian project always opens out as well onto some kind of moment of success...I wouldn't want to elaborate a theory of how art could be carried over into life's oraxis, since this highly utopian project now finds itself endangered by the widespread aestheticization of the world in merchandise, which is equivalent to an inauthentic elimination of the difference between art and life's praxis."

Petar Burger interview in Flash Art 1989

"To many artists (like the Guerilla Art Action Group, Jean Jacques Lebel, Wolf Vostell...) art has come to take a second place to direct political action. To others (like Allan Kaprow and the young street-artists of Yorkshire) art has meaning only to the extent that it involves itself in the life of the community around it. Yet others would seek relevance for their work as a new, non-logical form of scientific or social enquiry.

Whatever the next developments in the visual arts may be, it seems certain that the museum, and the private collection of handmade masterpieces, will be increasingly irrelevant to a generation of artists who have returned to a far older tradition of social integration and interaction."

Adrian Henri "Environments and Happenings", Thames and Hudson, 1974

"None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when we know no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did. From now to the end of consciousness we are stuck with the task of defending art..." p.5

Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories..." p.10

Transparency is the highest, most liberating value in art - and in criticism - today. Transparency means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are..." p.13

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" 1964, reprinted by Andre Deutsch, 1987

"As one might surmise, mail art is valued for humanistic reasons, rather than the intrinsic values of the items received, although a number of artists indicated a love for the items, artwork, and communications received. Other values...were...a sense of participation in a global culture, personal communication that helped to overcome mistrust, a sense of playfulness, fun, irreverence, surprises and responses."

Anna Banana, "Mail Art Canada" p.254 from "Correspondence Art" book, Contemporary Arts Press, USA, 1984

"The importance of the Art Strike lies not in its feasibility but in the possibilities it opens up for intensifying the class war. The Art Strike addresses a series of issues; most important amongst these is the fact that the socially imposed hierarchy of the arts can be actively and aggressively challenged. Simply making this challenge goes a considerable way towards dismantling the mental set and undermining its hegemonic position within a contemporary culture, since the success of art as a supposedly 'superior form of knowledge' is largely dependent upon its status remaining unquestioned."

Stewart Home "Art Strike 1990 - 1993" from the Art Strike Handbook.

"I don't believe at all that we are in the communication society as we have been told. We were told we had superceded the consumer society of the 60's and the communication society of the 70's. I don't think so. I believe that the communication society was the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, i.e. the beginning of radio. I think we're in the contamination/pollution society. Images contaminate us like viruses...A virus which contaminates me does not communicate with me, it contaminates me. It is a one-way relationship. And I believe that television images in particular are epidemiological images. They are not informative images which inform us in the sense of feedback, and of comprehension, but in the sense of an epidemic. In the sense of contamination, I believe we have entered the stage of mass contamination, by images, which are viral ones."

Paul Virilio interview on La Sept TV, France, reprinted in BLOCK 14, 1989

"Orange Alternative will still find plenty of mileage in an assured brutal and inflexible response from the authorities and this is their greatest weapon. But as a warning it should be noted, as the global market draws ever nearer, elsewhere that the skills necessary to reveal the multiple meanings within reality are in hot demand in the world of advertising and marketing. That is not to say that we live in Poland's future, of course, but we do live in a system where there is less reliance on a single version of the Truth, where multiple truths mean multiple opportunities for selling and where stripping away layers of meaning, ridiculing outdated assumptions with a flourish of smug cynicism and packing your message with multifarious bizarre and apparently unconnected references is the hallmark of the very cutting edge of po-mo advertising techniques, now even being adopted by the government in the marketing of social policy."

George Branchflower, "Oranges and Lemons" from Here and Now nos 7/8, 1989

"Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest, and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for anyone before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love."

R. D. Lang "The Politics of Experience" p.23, Penguin, 1967

"There is something inevitably ironic about floating new, long-term, radical schemes to transform the substance of intellectual life, in a situation where what you are actually doing most of the time in the context of Thatcherism is defending people's jobs. So you might say there is an embarrassing discrepancy between theory and practice; but it is only by holding open that long-term perspective that the energies for short-term resistance will be secured. You have to know what you want politically, you have to have a desire and a goal to work towards, to act as a critique of the present."

Tarry Eagleton (on cultural studies in the university institution) interview in Border/Lines no. 14, Canada, 1988/89.



# THE MAILART NETWORK; COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION, PLAY

creative thing, USA.



**MAIL ART IS** a cultural strategy that has developed and evolved spontaneously, over the last twenty-five years, providing artists with a worldwide network for sharing their ideas and work directly with others interested in communicating this way.

Today there is an Open International Network of artists and cultural workers exchanging letters, postcards, badges, stickers, rubberstampings, 'zines, embellished envelopes and just about anything else that can be sent via the International Postal System. The Mailart Network today can be seen as a tool accessible to anyone, regardless of geographic location, a means to get in touch with other cultural workers almost anywhere in the world and enter into a dialogue; exchanging ideas and sharing creative energy.

The network has no formal structure or organization whatsoever, it does have a history, which can be traced to specific groups of individuals or locations, but more important is the fact that it is a living, functioning network. To dwell on historical aspects of the network would detract from this, and could encourage fetishization, passive consumption which the network wish to do.

This article is therefore a contemporary view of the network, with all the examples being taken from direct experience.

Mailart (Mail Art, mailart, Mail art, abb., MA) has through widespread international usage become the most common term for networking activities. Although it has the advantage of brevity, it also has its drawbacks, the term is identifiably American, and there's the inevitable danger that by being 'Named', Mailart could be pinned down, listed and classified as just another art movement. I believe that this has already happened to some extent, there are several alternative terms often used interchangeably which are just as good, each has its own slightly different conceptual emphasis eg.

Correspondence Art.

Correspondence Art & thereal Open

Network (EON)

Postal Art Network (PAN)

Eternal Network

Eternal Network, a term introduced by Fluxus artist Robert Filliou is particularly useful in its openness and because it hints at the potential for communication which has since been explored in the network.

THE ETERNAL NETWORK

The eternal network is to develop the isolation of the single artist, to put the concept of 'avant garde' into question.

The network is the world. We don't even know what is going on, so the 'open mind' is the condition of artistic network to society network.

A simple device to get in contact with people.

artworks as exchange of foodstuff. Sometimes literally!

Everybody should be the centre of the Nelson (Universe)

Art is the research of the origin

Robert Filliou 1966

The Mailart Network is not alone, there are various other networks, often dealing with a specific medium or subject matter, examples being Poetry Magazine, Video, Super 8, and audio cassette Networks), most of these overlap at some points with the Mailart Network, and indeed within the Network itself there are many sub-networks. The Eternal Network also includes smaller independent or self-sufficient networks, known only to the participants and unaware of any interlinked wider scale networks. A real life example was of 2 groups of army cadets, one British, one German, who regularly exchanged the targets they used at rifle practice!

The Eternal Network changes constantly, participants come and go, but the network is always there, open to anyone who wishes to use it. Being informal, with no organization or hierarchy, and because of its open structure, and that anyone who wants to can take part, it has often been described as democratic, but ANARCHIC is a much better description. The Network seems disorderly and confusing to outsiders/non-participants, while those involved find their own place in the network, using it as a tool to create their own personal and shared realities.

One of the many contradictions of the Postal Art Network is that all this anarchic, maybe even subversive activity is made possible through the International Postal System, and thus indirectly, the governments which control and police the Postal System.

To gain a useful understanding of the Correspondence Art Network, it needs to be examined as a Cultural Strategy. A conventional Art Historical or even Aesthetic-based analysis is inappropriate. It is possible to list Mailart Superstars and describe their work, or even to mention famous artists who have at some point done Mailart, indeed this has been done, usually isolating individuals and their work out of context.

To start to trace the reasons why networking is a viable cultural strategy, a sociological approach is necessary, looking at the network in terms of: Communication, Participation, and Play.

## Communication

The Mailart Network facilitates direct communication between individuals, after initial tentative exploration a networker will discover that there are several hundred potential contacts, all directly accessible via the postal system, and usually at their home addresses. Response rates are quite high, maybe because of some kind of a 'networking etiquette', and the initial 'risk'

Mark Pawson, U.K.



taken in writing to another networker speculatively is usually regarded with a reply of some description.

Part of the satisfaction for networkers is that they are in full control of their activities, they decide who they'll write to, how often to correspond, how many correspondents to keep in touch with regularly (10-2000) and how personal their sendings will be, if each person gets the same postcards, or more specific intimate work. Immediacy is important, networking requires no special equipment or facilities, its usually done at home and the posted in the corner postbox. Most Mailartists get something in the post everyday (not sundays), mixed in together with other, mainly commerical mail, electricity bills, junk mail and birthday cards.

In corresponding with other networkers internationally, there's large variations and different levels of communication possible, ranging from language/text to visual work. For practical reasons English is the dominant language, but this creates problems, as it obviously puts anyone who can't read English at a disadvantage. This is precisely where communication either in a purely visual form, or as a mix of visuals and text together (as in much visual poetry) comes in useful.

Communication on this kind of a level can be very powerful, it can be very rewarding to interact with persons in vastly different cultural situations in this way. Clemente Padin sends me 8-page newsletters from Uruguay, nicely printed, but all in Portugese! I'm sure the contents are interesting, and I'd like to be able to read them, but even if I can't, I can still enjoy communicating on a more basic, human level.

The MA network is a great opportunity to reach 'artists' in countries that remain inaccessible through conventional media. Artists in several East European and South American countries face situations of restricted information and few opportunities to travel, for them the mailart network becomes a way to reduce cultural isolation, a vital sharing of ideas and energy. This, for me, is one of the most POWERFUL aspects of the network, it's a continuing challenge, not in any charitable way, but to genuinely share ideas with East European and South American artists, in an attempt to understand their situation.

Japanese Networker Ryosuke Cohen's long-running BRAIN CELL project is a good example of communication at a visual level.

For this project he invites Mailartists (and now Variant readers) to send their work in the form of small images (approx 2x2"), each time 50 of these are collected, they are collaged together and printed up into multicoloured A3 prints, each participant receives a copy, together with an address-list of all the other cells (participants) that make up this particular BRAIN CELL.

Brain Cell is an easy-to-understand project, in which virtually anyone can take part, each edition acts as a sample of networkers currently active, and the accompanying address list is a way to get in

# МАЙЛ АУТ

ХУДОЖНИКИ ИЗ 25 СТРАН



## ВЫСТАВКА ОТКРЫТА

со 2 по 11 января 1989 г.

в Ейской художественной школе —

ул. К. Либкнехта, 31,

с 14 часов до 18 часов.

Ейская голодная типография Ейского полиграфобъединения №11-88 г. Заказ 172, тираж 150

crackerjack kid, U.S.A.

"My flesh is an envelope  
My soul is the content.  
When I die, return to  
Sender." C. J. Kid

touch with networkers. Brain Cell 131 (May '89) lists participants from; Japan, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, France, U.S.S.R., Canada, Holland, East Germany, West Germany, Italy, U.S.A. and the U.K.

RYOSUKE COHEN/BRAIN CELL  
3-76-1-A-613  
YAGAMOKITACHO  
MORIGUCHI CITY  
OSAKA 570 JAPAN



FREE

INTERNETTING DIFFERENCE

THINGS TO MAKE  
AND  
THINGS TO DO

4. The cork cut to final shape



4. The cork cut to final shape



7. Wire staple

MATCH  
EXPERIMENTS

To really begin to understand the Eternal Network, it is essential to participate. Artifacts from the network, can be viewed at a show or seen in a magazine/book, but passive consumption cannot convey the dynamic of the Network. Ideally, mailart is an integrated experience, certainly it needs to be appreciated as such.

Each networker re/invents the network to suit themselves, deciding how it can be of most use, while simultaneously being both the centre of the network, and a small indistinguishable part of the Network as a whole.

Play for its own sake is something that we stop doing as we 'grow up', when we cease to be children. In today's society it's for kids only. Adults have to make do with poor substitutes, commercialised competitive sports being a prime example. In the Network, play is an important element, communications can be serious or frivolous, but some element of play, or playfulness is always present. Using the Network, to play is a kind of spontaneous-self-instruction, maybe even research for its own sake, to see what you can find out.

There does not need to be any specific aim or purpose to mailart, as it brings its own rewards.

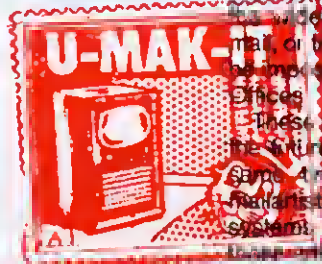
The playful and anarchic nature of the Network is its vitality, ensuring that it stays alive, and remains somewhat elusive to outsiders. It's too widespread and nebulous an activity for museums or collectors to appreciate its interest in.

The main threat perceived to the Network at present is through changes in the International Postal Systems, either through the widespread introduction of electronic mail, or from limitations of services likely to be imposed due to the Privatisation of Post Offices.

These possible changes - however far in the future they may occur, present at the same time, a threat and challenge to mailart. The advent of electronic mail systems is already being addressed by networkers using computers, as they are beginning to link up and form specific sub-networks, exchanging information on disc, or via modems.

Playing with the postal system itself is another aspect of networking, testing the limits and tolerance of the post office to see what can be delivered. There is a long tradition of pranks using the post office in this way often developed independently of any knowledge of other postal pranksters.

A recent example is the bright yellow plastic football that Ona Duddle posted to



O.J., U.K.

JAI Waste Paper co., U.K.

C.O. 1 X



me, the address was written directly onto the ball, with the stamps stuck on above it, and no other identifying marks. This football made it through the post O.K. and the postman appreciated the playfulness of it - he bounced it up and down on the front doorstep before handing it over!

One of the most important recent events in the Network was the 1986 Decentralised Worldwide Mailart Congress (DWMAC).

"The congress take place between 1 June and 1 October where two or more people meet to discuss personal experiences and general problems concerning networking." H.R. Fricker & G. Ruch, Switzerland 1985.

As mailartists travelled, and went on holiday, they naturally met up with others, and following on from these meetings the idea for a larger meeting had been circulating. One single meeting would have created many problems, the expense of travel, co-ordination and excluding those who could not attend. The Decentralised Worldwide Mailart Congress overcame all these problems, Fricker and Ruch's proposal provided an impetus and framework of co-ordination within the Network, artists in many countries organised about 80 meetings large and small, according to their situation, and access to facilities.

The meetings had from 2 - 40 participants, and varied from a friendly meeting in the pub or cafe, to formal round-the-table discussions. No overall agreements or decisions resulted from these meetings, and was probably unlikely from the start, but they did represent the possibility for new types of networking events, outside the postal system.

The Eternal Network will continue to develop and grow, it remains a viable cultural strategy for direct communication, and is open to anyone who wants to take part, share and experiment through postal communication.

Do you want to play?

Artists Newsletter carries listings of Mailart shows and projects - this is a good way to plug into the network.

Mark Pawson  
P.O. Box 664  
London E5 OJW

## NETWORKING MATERIAL

### AUTHENTIC MAIL-ART ARTISTS

- ☐ .... ARE EGALITARIAN
  - ☐ .... SCORN ETERNITY
  - ☐ .... THINK ART IS UPPER CLASS
  - ☐ .... NEED TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION
  - ☐ .... ARE PART OF THE NETWORK
- PLEASE CHECK THE INAPPROPRIATE ITEM.

MAIL ART IS NOT  
FINE ART  
IT IS THE ARTIST  
WHO IS FINE

mail art ist nicht  
Schöne kunst  
es sind die künstler  
die Schön sind

YOU'VE FALLEN IN LOVE  
WITH THE NEWEST,  
MOST FASHIONABLE AND  
HISTORICALLY VALID ART

YOU'VE FALLEN IN LOVE  
WITH THE NEWEST,  
MOST FASHIONABLE AND  
HISTORICALLY VALID ART



INTERNATIONAL MAIL ART  
IS THE MOST IMPORTANT  
AND MOST SIGNIFICANT  
ART MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD TODAY

"THE FUTURE OF MAIL ART?  
AFTER LETTERS, AUDIO, VIDEO,  
COMPUTER... THE PERSONAL CONTACT!"

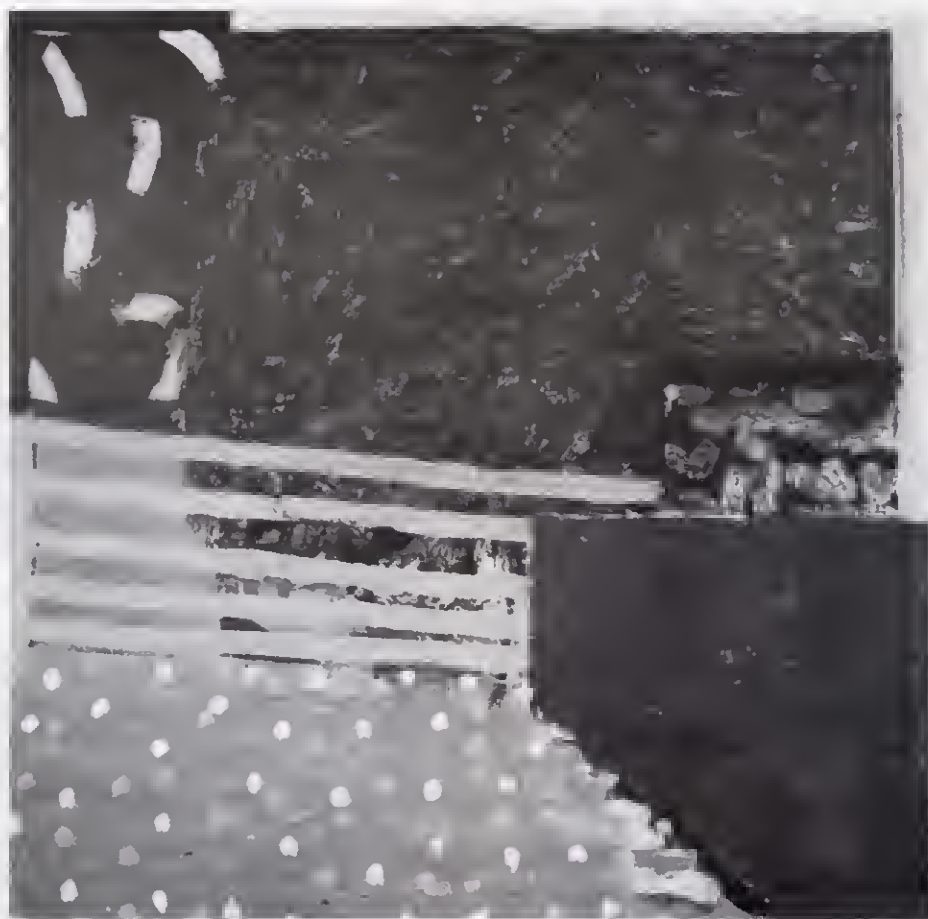
R. MAGGI

I AM A NETWORKER (SOMETIMES)

Mailartists on Mailart: Rubberstamp work by,  
R. Maggi; Italy, H.R. Fricker; Switzerland;  
D.M. Miller; U.S.A, Carlo Pittore; U.S.A,  
D. McLean; U.S.A, and R. Rockola; U.S.A.

# BLEND and CLASH: Theories Of Discretion

*Peter Suchin*



"Dialogic Painting" Peter Suchin, 24"x24"  
Acrylic on chipboard

The following grouping of sixty-five quotations was initially assembled as part of the material for an exhibition of both visual and written works which I held at Leeds Polytechnic Gallery, December 1988 - January 1989 under the title **'Theories of Discretion' Paintings, Collages and Texts.**

The exhibition comprised of some forty abstract paintings and collages, a number of (previously published) writings on various aspects of art practice and theory, and the quotations themselves - the latter took up but a miniscule amount of the available wall space yet were, for me at least, a most important part of the presentation. Their importance related not so much to the particular meaning or meanings 'embedded' in each separate cluster of words - though these meanings **were** significant - but to the very fact of their presentation within, and as part of the space of what could very easily have been seen as a certain type of exhibition of a certain type of work. It was my intention to attempt to

problematise the reading of the show and of each of its individual components, not out of any 'simple' irritability or (Dostoevskian) awkwardness vis-a-vis the contemporary conventions of the showing of works of art, and not out of any kind of homage - honourable or otherwise - to that particular mode of art world mores which appears to include, as a kind of fashion item, some snippet of the ostensibly radical, the ostensibly subversive. It was rather because prior to this (my first) exhibition I had already experienced a particular kind of reaction to the paintings I had shown various friends and associates, a reaction which I did not feel was entirely pertinent to the objects I had made, nor to a whole range of objects which are often and uniformly framed by the conventional description 'abstract art'.

Quotation number 34 below, a remark from Brian Eno, is to the point: 'One of the problems with art forms is that each



one carries the notion with it of how it should be received.' The reaction I refer to above was of the order of a reduction in meaning, a closure of interpretation. The appearance of the paintings - which I do not think needs to be described here - encouraged, as it still does, their consignment to a particular field of work, facilitating their placing amongst one set of discourses rather than another. I am trying to point to the fact that it is in effect incorrect to automatically associate what something looks like with what it actually is (see *Art & Language*, 'Portrait of V.I. Lenin', *Art-Language* Volume 4, Number 4, June 1980 for an account of some of the problems involved in relating the look of a given image with its actual genesis). Things are placed within particular frameworks sometimes willy nilly, meanings and values are ascribed through an already existant discourse, an invisible set of manners of reading. A much more direct way of saying all this might be to say that changing the text which accompanies a work or other object changes its meaning, and this is also to suggest that the way things get their meaning, and that meaning itself, is arbitrary. In Capitalist society there exists an extremely powerful and efficient set of technologies and distribution networks which cohere to allow for the quite subtle control of interpretation or, if you prefer, opinion. Within the more specific area of the art world there are similarly effective and efficient arbiters of taste and value. It is perhaps a truism to claim that it is critics and theorists (and not artists, as a rule) who place, through writings, lectures, television programmes and other media, an interpretation with a work, a theory with a practice. Yet truism or not it does appear that within art schools and indeed within the wider community of the art world old, nonsensical ideas about the purity of 'visual language' and fantasies of unrestrained, untainted self-expression have not been too greatly disturbed by the influx into Britain of more rigorously structured accounts - notably from France - of the relations involved in the construction of the subject. To be any kind of artist still too often raises the idea that one cannot therefore be any kind of intellectual also. The exceptional accounts are usually affixed to artists working in the newer media of video, performance or related practices - painting,

however, is tainted with an ideology of 'expression' and the criticising of this ideology is of necessity an intellectual task.

The actual quotations in my exhibition were taken from a larger collection which I have been assembling over the last few years. Whilst I want to emphasise the diverse and even contradictory implications of the material included, particularly when placed together in the format reproduced here, I do not want to deny that some tendencies of intention, of particular approaches to the reading of 'works of art' have been emphasised over others. Nevertheless it is intended that some openness of approach is maintained, if not positively encouraged by the structure of the juxtaposition of the various passages and remarks which are, it is hoped, 'set in motion by the shock of their unevenness...lit by each other's reflections virtually like a trail of flashes on precious stones' (Stephane Mallarme, *The Poems*, Penguin, 1977, p. 45).

In closing these notes I would like to make reference to what is by now a fairly common sensibility within so-called Postmodern culture, that is the widespread deployment of quotations and detailed references within novel works across a wide range of media. I have made a point of stressing my sources but, pace Barthes' seminal essay 'The Death of the Author' it is possible to read the sixty-five quotations as being themselves accumulations of other quotations: 'We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' (Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, Fontana, 1977, p. 146). I would also like to draw the reader's attention to Walter Benjamin's idea of assembling a text entirely from extracts from other sources, a proposition discussed in Hannah Arendt's introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations* (Fontana, 1973, p. 45 and following).

1. 'However strong historically the tendency towards a recurrence of pleasure may be, pleasure remains infantile when it asserts itself directly and without mediation. Art, absorbs pleasure as remembrance and longing; it does not copy it, does not seek to produce pleasure as an immediate effect.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
2. '...encratic language (the language produced and spread under the protection of power) is statutorily a language of repetition; all official institutions of language are repeating machines: school, sports, advertising, popular songs, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words: the stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of ideology ...The bastard form of mass culture is humiliated repetition: content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions - these are repeated, but the superficial forms are varied: always new books, new programs, new films, new items, but always the same meaning....'  
- Roland Barthes.
3. '...who says there is more thought in labour than in enjoyment?'  
- Gilles Deleuze.
4. 'In a society lacking stability, lacking unity, it is not possible to create stable definite art.'  
- Stephane Mallarme.
5. 'The utopia anticipated by artistic form is the idea that things at long last ought to come into their own.'  
- Theodor Adorno
6. '...a theory based on anachronistic ideological ground cannot have a progressive effect.'  
- Marcelin Pleyenet.
7. 'The artist has no morals, but he has a morality. In his work, there are these questions: What are others for me? How am I to desire them? How am I to lend myself to their desire? How am I to behave

- among them?'  
- Roland Barthes.
8. '...one can look to the dependence of the painter as 'subject' on the history that constitutes his (biography) or the historical reality within which this history is constituted (for example, the constitution of a 'subject' within the totality of a social practice: the class struggle), and so on.'  
- Marcelin Pleynet.
  9. 'The problem is how to preserve art and how to destroy art in the process.'  
- Hans Hess.
  10. 'The reduction of reading to a consumption is clearly responsible for the "boredom" experienced by many in the face of the modern ("unreadable") text, the avant-garde film or painting: to be bored means that one cannot produce the text, open it out, set it going.'  
- Roland Barthes.
  11. 'The real political task today, at least in so far as it is also concerned with the cultural...is to carry forward the resistance that writing offers to established thought, to what has already been done, to what everyone thinks, to what is well-known, to what is widely recognized, to what is "readable", to everything which can change its form and make itself acceptance to opinion in general. The latter...always works with what is taken for granted and with what is forgotten as such - for it grants no place to anamnesis. It is prejudiced. 'Culture' consists, as 'activity' and 'animation', in introducing all that into the order of writing, in the wide sense, into literature, painting, architecture and so on...I think that we have to resist...I can take...the artists and writers whom I hold to be ...in their various ways, models of resistance (they may hate to be so described but that is quite another problem). Perhaps they lock themselves away, apart from everyone, unknown to the general public; I would say that in one sense that does not matter, for they do not owe this resistance to the community directly but to thought. Whether it is in a century or in six months that the community realizes the necessity of what they have done is another question. Their essential task is above all to write, to paint, and so on, and to do this here and now in response (and responsibility) to that question: what is writing, painting?'  
- Jean-Francois Lyotard.
  12. 'As society congeals into a system of total interdependence, those works of art which store up the experience of this totalizing process become the antithetical other of society. Using the term 'abstract' in its loosest sense for a moment, we can say that abstractness in art signals a withdrawal from the objective world at a time when nothing remains of that world save its caput mortuum.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
  13. 'The language I speak within myself is not of my time; it is prey, by nature, to ideological suspicion; thus, it is with this language that I must struggle. I write because I do not want the words I find...'  
- Roland Barthes.
  14. 'Revolutionary practice, on whatever scale it takes, is a polyphonic practice: a vast syncretism of behaviours, discourses, symbols, actions, determinations - a plural activity...we must learn to consider the intellectual's role. He is not a proxy. He doesn't speak in the name of the proletariat: he must speak in his own name, in a revolutionary perspective, to account for what he needs, what hinders his intellectual activities, the alienations imposed upon him as an intellectual by our present society. He will be all the more a revolutionary if he measures the extent of his own alienation, and not just that of others.'  
- Roland Barthes.
  15. 'It remains the case...that no theory...however comprehensive, can be constructed from intuitions alone, fine as they may be. Theory demands first of all the working through of a problematic in the painter's practice in order to produce a real 'revolution'...It has always been the case that the painter, 'the artist', considers the specificity of painting (if he considers it at all) as autonomous...In order to outline a theory he must engage in a relation with literary language. He thus has to take into consideration the autonomy of the language he uses, the history of that language, and more precisely still the historical itinerary of the concepts (philosophical, for instance) that he is led to use. That is to say, he must contemplate his own discipline, painting, no longer in its specific autonomy but rather in its differential specificity (a specificity whose reality is equally constituted by what differentiates it from other disciplines and by the relation that it maintains with these differences).'  
- Marcelin Pleynet.
  16. 'The dialogue must remain an inextinguishable accompaniment of human life.'  
- Hans-Georg Gadamer.
  17. 'In a false world all hedone is false. This goes for artistic pleasure, too. Art renounces happiness for the sake of happiness, thus enabling desire to survive in art.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
  18. 'I don't like party lines. They make for intellectual monotony and bad prose...There are many intellectual tasks, and different levels of discourse. If there is a question of appropriateness, it is not because some events or works of art are more 'reasonable' targets, but because people who reason in public have - and ought to exercise - options about how many and how complex are the points they want to make. And where, in what form, and to what audience they make them.'  
- Susan Sontag.



19. 'One class of...shapes might readily be imagined as dwellings...Another class as weapons. Another as models of landscapes. Etc. etc. So here I know how I can ascribe meaning to a meaningless shape.'  
- Ludwig Wittgenstein.
20. 'In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an "ideal" receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.'  
- Walter Benjamin.
21. 'It is not up to the artist to reinstate a make-believe 'reality' which the drive toward knowledge, technology, and wealth will continually destroy in order to replace it with a version more viable - and which itself will eventually be replaced.'  
- Jean-Francois Lyotard.
22. 'The painting teaches the artist as much as the artist teaches the painting.'  
- Hans Hess.
23. 'The manner in which art communicates with the outside world is in fact also a lack of communication, because art seeks, blissfully or unhappily, to seclude itself from the world.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
24. 'There should be a critical movement that both deflates seemingly important objects and shows how people make sense from nothing.'  
- Roland Barthes.
25. 'The object of art - like every other product - creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.'  
- Karl Marx.
26. 'The very classification 'amateur' has an apologetic ring. But that very word - from the Latin 'amateur' - 'lover' means one who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity.'  
- Maya Deren.
27. '...to write is to permit others to conclude one's own discourse, /and writing is only a proposition whose answer one never knows. One writes in order to be loved, one is read without being able to be loved, it is doubtless this distance which constitutes the writer.'  
- Roland Barthes.
28. '...it is the question of the persona; who am I? How do I appear to others?'  
- Hans Hess.
29. 'Everything has a meaning...Meaning is so fated for mankind that art (as liberty) seems to be used, especially today, not for making sense, but on the contrary for keeping it in suspense; for constructing meanings, but without filling them in exactly.'  
- Roland Barthes.
30. '...we still have to realize that we've been witnessing a permanent process of reformation in the individual's ability to see and then to love what he sees. But that's not at all the situation to be found in the majority of the works that are being produced today. They don't teach me anything. I say to myself, "I've already seen that, and I've already seen it done better." The over emphasis of the hand, the agitated drawing, and all the rest of it, we already know that and we've already seen it. I'm not saying that it's entirely without interest, I'm just saying that it's without any interest for me.'  
- Jean-Francois Lyotard.
31. '...when the scene is over and the picture gone, we remember we are no longer the same as we were before...'  
- Roland Barthes.
32. 'If I were a painter, I should paint only colors: this field seems to me freed of both the Law (no limitation, no Analogy) and Nature (for after all, do not all the colors in Nature come from the painters?)'  
- Roland Barthes.
33. 'Art, if it is to keep its distance from entertainment, requires a philosophical component. This remark should not be taken to mean that artists should cease the making of sensuous objects, taking up instead the philosopher's pen. The making of art should be an inherently critical activity. Art's critical function is apparent when it challenges the hegemony of that which has been rendered "natural" in our culture by the eyes of Science.'  
- Peter Suchin.
34. 'One of the problems with art forms is that each one carries the notion with it of how it should be received.'  
- Brian Eno.
35. 'I believe, in effect, that all fine sentences are endowed with an inalienable right which renders them untransferable to any acquirer other than the one whom they have been awaiting and for whom they are destined by fate.'  
- Marcel Proust.
36. 'It is only rising barbarism that limits works of art to what meets the eye...'  
- Theodor Adorno.

37. '...he paints because he wants to find out who he is; he paints because he is curious to know what comes next.'  
- Hans Hess.
38. 'My word remains in the continuing dialogue, where it will be heard, answered and reinterpreted.'  
- Mikhail Bakhtin.
39. 'Authenticity seems to me to be the problem.'  
- Terry Atkinson.
40. 'The element repressed from the history of painting (color) thus appeals here as determining the very possibility of painting...through the transformational mediation of theory.'  
- Marcelin Pleynet.
41. 'In the last instance...any attempt at explanation of a successful painting will leave some form of remainder. If that were not the case we should have no need of paintings. It is certainly the case, however, that the misrepresentations of works of art in history and criticism can impose a kind of screen between work and viewer.'  
- Charles Harrison and Fred Orton.
42. 'Art's essence is twofold: on the one hand, it dissociates itself from empirical reality and from the functional complex that is society; and on the other, it belongs to that reality and to that social complex.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
43. 'Interpretation reveals its complexity when we realise that a new force can only appear and appropriate an object by first of all putting on the mask of the forces which are already in possession of the object.'  
- Gilles Deleuze.
44. 'Meaning sticks to man: even when he wants to create non-meaning or extra-meaning, he ends by producing the very meaning of non-meaning or extra-meaning. It is all the more legitimate to keep returning to the question of meaning, in that it is precisely this question which impedes the universality of painting. If so many men (because of cultural differences) have the impression of "understanding nothing" in front of a canvas, it is because they want meaning and because the canvas (they think) does not give it to them.'  
- Roland Barthes.
45. '...devotion to the text means the constant effort to grasp that which it hides.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
46. 'Let's say that modern art insists upon the individual as fragmented, wandering, at loose ends, as one who cannot find himself in the mirror of any ideology.'  
- Julia Kristeva.
47. 'Art is like a plenipotentiary of a type of praxis that is better than the prevailing praxis of society, dominated as it is by brutal self-interest.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
48. 'Society today has no use for art and its responses to it are pathological. In this society, art survives as reified cultural heritage and as a source of pleasure for the box-office customer, but ceases to have relevance as an object.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
49. 'Works of art...are identifiable as such simply because... social processes ...have fixed onto them the label "art".  
- Roger Taylor.
50. '...those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere...'  
- Roland Barthes.
51. 'The person has departed, having spoken his word, but the word itself remains in the open-ended dialogue.'  
- Mikhail Bakhtin.
52. 'Art is the promise of happiness, a promise that is constantly being broken.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
53. 'The only relation to art that can be sanctioned in a reality that stands under the constant threat of catastrophe is one that treats works of art with the same deadly seriousness that characterizes the world today.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
54. '...the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.'  
- Marcel Duchamp.
55. '...the works of art which accumulate as the remnants of his despair.'  
- Hans Hess.
56. 'But what is color? A kind of bliss.'  
- Roland Barthes.
57. 'One could hardly find a better definition of the theoretical project - the inscription of a practice in the theoretical space that alone can actualize it.'  
- Marceline Pleynet.
58. 'Public opinion does not like the language of intellectuals. Hence he has often been dismissed by an accusation of intellectualist jargon. And hence he felt himself to be the object of a kind of racism: they excluded his language, i.e. his body: "you don't talk the way I do, so I exclude you."  
- Roland Barthes.



60. 'It may be more correct to say that all art is sad than it is tragic. This goes especially for art that thinks it is gay and harmonious.'  
- Theodor Adorno.
61. '...it is possible to enjoy the codes even while nostalgically imagining that someday they will be abolished : like an intermittent outsider, I can enter into or emerge from the burdensome sociality, depending on my mood - of insertion or of distance.'  
- Roland Barthes.
62. '...exhibitions... are stage-managed by the media...and thus popular viewing is not "popular"...No matter how many people visit galleries painting cannot enter into any relationship with its audience because its function has already been prescribed by society. The audience is only expected to look not think; the best painting can achieve in such a situation is an expressive not a cognitive function.'  
- R.N. Wynyard.
63. 'The most rudimentary behaviour must be determined both in relation to the real and present factors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. This is what we call the project.'  
- Jean-Paul Sartre
64. 'Our civilization...is a civilization of words, despite the invasion of images.'  
- Roland Barthes.
65. 'And who could write better than a painter?'  
- Roland Barthes

The quotations, numbered for reference, are taken from the following sources:

1. Aesthetic Theory, RKP, 1984, p.21.
2. The Pleasure of the Text, Hill and Wang, 1975, p.33.
3. Nietzsche and Philosophy, Athlone, 1983, p.9
4. Quoted in Edward Braun, The Director and the Stage, Methuen, 1982, p.38.
5. Aesthetic Theory, p. 195.
6. Painting and System, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 127.
7. The Responsibility of Forms, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 173.
8. Painting and System, p.60.
9. Pictures as Arguments, Sussex University Press, 1975, p. 137.
10. Image-Music-Text, Fontana, 1977, p. 163.
11. Quoted in Willem van Reijen and Dick Veerman, 'An Interview with Jean-Francois Lyotard', Theory, Culture & Society, Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3, June 1988, pp. 302-303.
12. Aesthetic Theory, p.45.
13. The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 39-40.
14. The Grain of the Voice, Jonathan Cape, 1985, p. 163.
15. Painting and System, pp. 121-122.
16. Quoted in Roy Boyne, 'An Interview with Hans-Georg Gadamer', Theory, Culture & Society, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 1988, p.30.
17. Aesthetic Theory, p.18.
18. A Susan Sontag Reader, Penguin, 1983, p. 332.
19. Zettel (2nd Edition), Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 35.
20. Illuminations, Fontana, 1973, p.69.

21. 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime', Artforum, April 1982, p.69.
22. Pictures as Arguments, p. 31.
23. Aesthetic Theory, p.7.
24. The Grain of the Voice, p. 67.
25. Grundrisse, Pelican, 1973, p. 92.
26. Quoted in Patricia Erens (ed.), Sexual Stratagems The World of Woman in Films, Horizon Press, 1979, p. 186.
27. Critical Essays, Northwestern University Press, 1972, pp. 278-279.
28. Pictures as Arguments, p. 86.
29. The Grain of the Voice, p. 19.
30. Quoted in Bernard Blistene, 'A Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard', Flash Art, No. 121, March 1985, p. 35.
31. The Responsibility of Forms, p. 117.
32. Roland Barthes, Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 143.
33. 'The Treasure of the Perplexed: Ignorance as "Bliss" in Fine Art Education', Art Monthly, No. 98, July/August 1986, p. 31.
34. Quoted in Ziyad Georgis, 'East of the Testcard', Melody Maker, November 23, 1985, p. 36.
35. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'N (Theoretics of Knowledge; Theory of Progress)', The Philosophical Forum, Vol. XV, nOS. 1-2, Fall-Winter 1983-84, pp. 37-38.
36. Prisms, p. 138.
37. Pictures as Arguments, p. 150.
38. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 300.
39. Remark made at 'State of the Art' dayschool, Cartwright Hall, Bradford, Saturday, June 27, 1987.
40. Painting and System, p. 107.
41. 'Jasper Johns: "Meaning what you See"', Art History, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1984, p. 98.42. Aesthetic Theory, P. 358.
43. Nietzsche and Philosophy, p.5.
44. The Responsibility of Forms, pp. 183-184.
45. Prisms, p. 144.
46. Quoted in Catherine Francblin, 'Interview with Julia Kristeva', Flash Art, No. 126, February-March 1986, p. 46.
47. Aesthetic Theory, p. 17.
48. Aesthetic Theory, p. 22.
49. Art, an Enemy of the People, The Harvester Press, 1978, p. 49.
50. S/Z, Hill and Wang, 1974, p. 16.
51. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p. 300.
52. Aesthetic Theory, p. 196.
53. Prisms, p. 185.
54. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Eds.), The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp, Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 40.
55. Pictures as Arguments, p. 62.
56. The Responsibility of Forms, p. 166.
57. Painting and System, p. 105.
58. Roland Barthes, p. 103.
59. The Grain of the Voice, p. 21.
60. Aesthetic Theory, p. 42.
61. Roland Barthes, p. 131.
62. 'Painting and Technological Society', The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 26, No. 1, Winter 1986, p. 59.
63. Search for a Method, Vintage, 1968, p. 91.
64. The Grain of the Voice, p. 31.
65. The Responsibility of Forms, p. 189.

N.B.: Full details of a given text are only cited at its first mention in the listing.

Since the quotations were selected and juxtaposed as part of the exhibition "Theories of Discretion" Paintings, Collages and Texts (Leeds Polytechnic Gallery, December 1988 - January 1989) it should be pointed out that their relationship to the visual works is of an intense (and not merely supplementary) nature.

# MARX, CHRIST & SATAN UNITED IN STRUGGLE: Stewart Home interviewed by Karen Goaman

Stewart Home and Gabrielle Quinn performing "Requiem for the Unknown Plagiarist in B Minor (both performing as Karen Eliot), Parachute Club, Aldershot, England 1/11/86

Stewart Home has made something of a name for himself recently. He organised the Festival Of Plagiarism at Transmission Gallery in Glasgow and has previously produced work for shows such as 'Ruins of Glamour/Glamour of Ruins' (Chisenhale Studios, London, 1986), 'Desire in Ruins' (Transmission Gallery, Glasgow 1987) and the 'Festival of Plagiarism' in London 1988 (which he co-organised with Ed Baxter and Graham Harwood). Home is one of the organisers of the Art Strike 1990-3, in which participating cultural workers will refuse all cultural activity in order to question the identity of artists and the role art plays within contemporary society.

His other interventions include editing and publishing issues of 'Smile' magazine (often under the multiple name of Karen Eliot) and writing fiction (see for example the short stories 'Anarchist' in 'Smile' 9, London 1986 and 'Class War' in 'Vague' 21, London, 1989). Pure mania, his first novel, will be published by Polygon Books later this year. The latter is in part a parody of the Richard Allen skinhead novels published by New English Library in the 1970s.

Home's first book 'The Assault On Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War' (Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, London, 1988), traces a set of influences and traditions which can be linked to Dada and Futurism, from Lettrisme through COBRA, the Situationists, to groups such as Fluxus and Class War.

It appears that many of those who come across Home's work are intrigued, irritated, antagonised and/or repelled by it. This could be exactly the kind of reaction Home is after. This interview goes some way towards situating his work and posing some of the questions raised by it, such as the obscurity of meaning and intention which would appear to contradict his anti-art and 'demolish serious culture' stance.

The interview is constructed from several discussions between Karen Goaman and Mo Dodson with Stewart Home.

KG: When I first came across your work, especially your writing, it seemed to be speaking to a very particular audience, you could say a clique, which I wasn't able to identify. How would you characterise your own milieu and would you say it was part of a wider 'movement'?

SH: Well, I'd only use the term 'movement' ironically, but, I would characterise the wider 'movement' with which I have some affinity as including class struggle anarchism, the direct action libertarian left. I'm often described as an anarchist by Leninists and those to the right of what, for the sake of convenience, we'll call orthodox Marxism. On the other hand, quite a lot of people in the anarchist movement don't think I'm an anarchist at all. Vernon Richards once took the trouble of putting pen to paper to tell me that what I did was meaningless to him and that he didn't consider it to be anarchy. Personally I feel more affinity with people like the journalist Tom Vague, a former punk who isn't worried about whether what he does is considered ideologically acceptable by the self-styled fuhrers of British anarchism. Basically you could describe what I'm into as anti-authoritarianism.

As for the audience for what I do, put crudely it crosses over between anarchists, punks and ex-punks and avant-garde types. A lot of people who like my fiction aren't interested in the theory or the exhibitions, and the fiction often disgusts those who might otherwise think of me as reasonably interesting and intelligent.

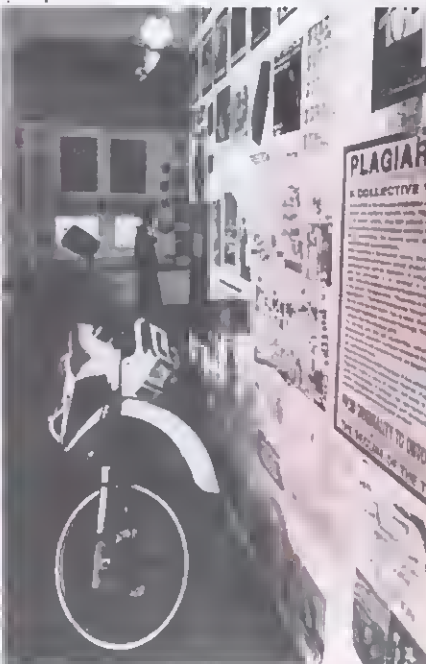
KG: To what extent do you think people use particular practices such as political positions and texts (for example postmodernism, Situationists, anarchism, avant-garde art, Marxism etc) to construct an identity for themselves that differentiates them for others, as a kind of cultural or symbolic capital to mark off their own distinction?

SH: It's a factor in the use of these practices. Bourdieu provides a crisp, clearly defined, language for describing this process in his book 'Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste'. While it's plainly ridiculous to ignore the way in which beliefs assist individuals to shape their own identities, it's equally silly to take a reductionist stand and explain all beliefs, actions and tastes, in terms of some overwhelming need to construct a sense of self. Apart from anything else, rather than freely forming our own tastes, these are partially formed for us by our class, the age we live in and numerous other factors.

KG: How have your ideas and activities developed, in terms of your own intellectual history?

SH: My education, for want of a better term, has largely been informal. When I was fourteen and first into punk, around 1976-7, I can remember reading articles in the Sunday magazines saying that punk was like Dada and Futurism. I didn't know what these things were and so over the next couple of years I gradually found out through a very unsystematic and occasional programme of reading. I'd never heard of anarchism until I saw the Sex Pistols on the 'So It Goes' tv show in August '76. I thought the Pistols were fantastic so I went and looked up anarchy in a dictionary. Later on, I'd talk to people about things and they'd maybe lend me a book or suggest something I should read and I'd just follow things up myself. School or college were a waste of time. I learnt far more in my own time than I ever did through formal

"The Festival of Plagiarism", Transmission



Gallery, August 1989



education. Punk was very inspiring to me as a teenager. It seemed very natural to buy a cheap electric guitar and form a band. Later on, around 1982-3, I decided that since I'd become a musician without knowing anything about music, I could become an artist without knowing about art.

KG: You have no formal art training?

SH: No. I did a History Of Ideas degree at Kingston Polytechnic but I was thrown out in the final year after repeatedly criticising the way the teachers used the spector of failure and poor grades as a means of enforcing intellectual conformity. At this time, I was interested in the whole process of legitimisation, in academia, the arts, government, and so forth. I can remember going into galleries and thinking I could make better work than the trash that was on display. But it wasn't just a question of making better work, the point was I had to go through a complex social and administrative process to get myself accepted as a 'legitimate' artist.

One of the problems connected to this process of legitimisation is that very few people have a clear definition of what art is. To me it's a subset of categories such as music, painting and writing which are arbitrarily held to be of objectively higher value than other cultural products. However, because many artists have immense difficulties understanding such a definition, my critique of art has sometimes been misunderstood as a pathological hatred of painting and sculpture.

KG: Tell me more about the ideas that have influenced you and the groups you've been involved with.

SH: As a teenager I had fleeting contact with various Trotskyite groups. I knew some people in the Socialist Youth League and went to a few of their meetings but I was denounced as an individualist after suggesting that direct action was more effective than sitting around having pointless debates.

I had a great deal of contact with Rock Against Racism because Crisis, a punk band that I followed, played virtually nothing but Anti-Nazi benefits. RAR was a front organisation for the Socialist Workers Party. I was really shocked at the way a lot of white RAR activists reacted to black people with inverted racism. The SWP only seemed interested in the black population as cannon-fodder for its own cause. I was never actively involved with RAR but I know at least one former activist who was so alienated by the whole set up that he eventually joined the National Front. This put me right off mainstream Marxist parties but I carried on looking for a home on what, for the sake of convenience, I'll call the left. Around 1980 I was a member of one of the collectives which produced the magazine Anarchy. In 1984 I became involved with the Neoists, a kind of post-Dada group. The following year I joined the Workers Playtime collective, who produced a workerist journal with libertarian leanings.

KG: You've done an immense amount of research into the Situationists, which you've



used for instance in the book 'The Assault On Culture'.

SH: One of the reasons I wrote 'The Assault On Culture' was to demystify the Situationists. When I was first involved with the anarchist scene in London I can remember people giving me Situationist texts to read but refusing to explain what they meant. If I told them I didn't understand their pamphlets they told me I was stupid. If I really pressed them they'd say the Situationists provided the total revolutionary critique. To me this attitude didn't seem any different to how the teachers had behaved at school. I was in a class which was supposed to be the cream of this crappy secondary school and we were told we were too thick to read

Shakespeare. So my attitude was always, well fuck you. I'll read it and keep re-reading it until I understand it just to prove you're wrong, and afterwards I'll tell you its shit.

KG: And that motivated your research and your writing 'The Assault On Culture'?

SH: Partially, I wanted the book to be a kind of bluff-your-way guide, to deprive these ex-public school boys within the anarchist movement of their specialist knowledge. But to go back to the Situationists, when I looked into the group I found that most of their ideas could be traced back to other sources such as Dada, COBRA, Marx, the Frankfurt School, Henri Lefebvre, Lukacs and so on. The situationists just dressed this stuff up in surrealist cliches.

KG: But couldn't you say that Situationist texts were an initial conduit of some particular insights, particularly in terms of their critique of society, and that you've absorbed these insights and been more influenced by them than your very critical position would suggest?

SH: I wouldn't say that being critical of something doesn't mean you haven't been influenced by it. Influence can be negative as well as positive. But even if the Situationists had been the greatest single influence on my intellectual development and had provided posterity with the total revolutionary critique, I would still find it tactically necessary to criticise them. The point is I have to deal with individuals who use so called situationist ideas and the myth created around the group in a very oppressive way. I've found that the most effective tactic to use against these people is to undercut the credibility of Debord and Vaneigem, both of whom were in any case poor theorists. Their rhetorical technique was basically to make gross generalisations but state them as though



"All Out for Nuclear Destruction and the Next Evolutionary Stage" (1988) by Stewart Home (working as Karen Eliot).



they were incontrovertable fact. The idea seems to have been to convert other people - primarily students - to situationist beliefs and practices. As part and parcel of this process, the reader was encouraged to treat this propaganda as theory. As a result it's very difficult to get individuals who've undergone a political conversion from devouring these texts to view them critically.

KG: But what you've said about Situationist texts seems to apply to your own writing, for instance in 'Smile'.

SH: Yeah, but the texts in 'Smile' are parodies of situationist writing.

KG: But people don't always understand your use of irony. A rather notorious example is your paragraph on 'Ecological Politics' in 'Smile' No.9. You write, for example, 'There is no other ideology as reactionary as ecology, as the idea that we shouldn't wipe rain forests from the earth's terrain, that we shouldn't build nuclear reactors.'

SH: That was satire, a parody of the kind of sweeping generalisations made in situationist texts. There are some pro-situationists who took it at face value and thought it was great. Then they met one of my friends and were ranting on at him about creating a situationist revolution and for some reason they quoted the piece on ecology from 'Smile' and my friend said 'Oh, you should meet Stewart, he's a vegetarian and takes all his bottles to be recycled, and he'll have a go at you if you drop litter in the street.' The pro-situs got really upset. I wish I'd seen their faces as it dawned on them that not everyone else is as narrow minded as they are. If you really believe in something you should be able to articulate a reasonable argument against it if someone can only imagine taking a single line on an issue then to me that indicates they're only dealing with it on an emotional level and haven't come to grips with the subject intellectually.

MD: But if you're using irony in a way that isn't clear, aren't you taking a very high art relationship to your audience, in the sense that in your work, the meaning is obscure and difficult, and there are complex levels that a lot of people don't understand. You seem to be claiming a post modernist/post structuralist kind of relationship to your audience, in the sense that you justify irony that doesn't work by saying that your work's not closed off, it's open to multiple readings and interpretations. But with all this, you claim to be coming from a populist position, and not a high art one. This seems to me to be contradictory. It doesn't mix.

SH: A lot of popular culture is misunderstood when viewed by audiences unfamiliar with the genre to which it belongs. Bigots who want to censor gore movies don't always realise that films like the "Evil Dead" are actually slapstick comedies. Utterly ludicrous scenes, such as those showing individuals throwing themselves up against walls after being possessed by evil spirits have been cited as vicious and violent by those campaigning against these films.

In the case of my writing it takes a point and pounds it into the ground. It's deliberately relentless and very sharply focussed. This would seem to mitigate against the reader assuming that meaning is being dispersed through a gridwork of adjacent discourses, which leave it open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

MD: In that sense I don't think your work is high art at all, it's very specific and non-high-art, but your justification of it tends to make it slip back into the phrasing high art people use, of there being no single meaning.

But going back to your point about popular culture, the thing is that, once you've learnt the code, the meanings aren't problematic in the same way that the text, especially for the avant garde and 20th century high art, is always problematic.

Popular culture workers, on the other hand, are always worried about what the audience is getting. Do you ever say to yourself I want people to get my full meaning and what am I going to do about it?

SH: No, because I know from talking to people that there are already individuals who understand what I'm saying, quite a lot of the people who don't understand what I do seem to get upset by it and that pleases me too because it seems to indicate they've realised that there's a factor involved which they haven't grasped.

MD: Supposing a lot of your audience were fascists misreading your irony and your intentions?

SH: (laughing) Well, that would tell me where their ideas were at!

MD: But to not care what your audience takes is anti-populist!

SH: I find a lot of popular culture is very cynical. In the Richard Allen skinhead books there are loads of references to the author which the audience are presumably not intended to understand. In one book there's a copper called PC Allen, in another an author called Dick Arlen. In several he has characters rave about books he'd written under other names.

MD: That's the difference between a populist who's cynical and a populist whose genuine. A cynical populist would say 'I don't want my audience to see I'm laughing up my sleeve at them, except a few of my intellectual mates.' But a genuine populist like Barbara Cartland actually believes the crap she writes - she'd be worried if people weren't feeling dewey-eyed as the hero with the ten foot jaw clasped the woman to his breast.

SH: But I don't think I need to worry about fascists liking my writing and getting what they see as a positive message from it. The way I see and depict class as a major division within society mitigates against that. Fascists see the nation as an undivided, mythic, community, so they're not going to like writing which focuses on the issue of class. It would take a very willful misreading of my work for someone to come away from it with the impression that I have any truck with nationalism

KG: But surely work of yours can easily be

misread, take the short story 'Frenzy of the Flesh' that you put in the 'Art Strike' pamphlet (Sabotage Editions, London 1989), where you wrote about a gullible art student being sexually abused by a performance art teacher who got killed in revenge, with the art student then being murdered in a grotesquely horrible way by a homicidal anti-smoker, who was then killed by the art school technician who was the lover of the gullible art student, and who was then told he had lung cancer because he'd smoked all his life. Could somebody use it to fuel their prejudices against a particular type of bohemian person or any other 'oppositional' type they might link to that, or could it be used to justify brutal perversion or violence?

They might think...

(everybody laughing here)

SH: They might think 'This is well wicked...'

MD: What were your original intentions in that particular story?

SH: It was meant to be funny, to deflate the pretensions of a lot of performance artists and people like that. I hope it helped fuel prejudice against artists, students and bohemians. It was a piece of propaganda. I wanted to mix all this up with a point about smoking, which is something I take a very strong stand against. I've got in some very heavy situations telling people not to smoke in the no smoking carriages on trains. I thought the best way to make the point was with humorous and very twisted moralism - anti-smoking and ultra-violence!

KG: But you don't just use violence in your fiction, for instance a lot of the videos shown during the Festival Of Plagiarism in Glasgow were very violent. What's your purpose in using it?

SH: Three or four of the twenty or thirty videos we screened could possibly be characterised as violent but the usage is representational - I don't really feel any need to justify it, it's not real, it's acted, it's representational.

KG: But wasn't there a real suicide on one of the videos shown at the Festival?

SH: That was taken from a live broadcast on American tv. If you're an anarchist I think watching a video of a politician blowing their own brains out can be quite uplifting. I found my own experience with that piece of film very interesting. The first time I saw it I found it quite upsetting, then after a while I could watch it without feeling anything very much at all. I was interested in seeing how it's meaning was changed when it was used within a fictional narrative. The footage was also very heavily treated with effects, so most of the emotional impact comes from the sound.

KG: So what would you say attracts you to violence?

SH: You could say I just reflect what goes on around me. There's another argument which would explain it in terms of my identity and sense of differentiation. But that's certainly not the whole story, it's also to do with the kind of culture I've experienced ever since I went to school, with a very high level of repression and



people getting beaten up all the time.

MD: So you'd entertain a kind of psychologistic interpretation or insight. That's interesting because not many 20th century artists would do that - they'd say to interpret a work as something that results from your own personal feelings of rejection, or of being bullied or needing to bully, would be an insult to their work; they'd say the work is an objective insight into a higher, a universal, reality.

SH: Well, that's bullshit! I'd say the question is not whether you're shaped by social forces but to what degree. I'm also very aware that I've a chip on my shoulder, the important thing for me is to direct my hatred against all the wankers who told me I was nothing because I went to school on a GLC overspill estate. The idea of peace and love and everybody holding hands and being mutually supportive is a complete anathema to me. However, in the case of my work the violence is, as I've said, just representation.

MD: But that's going back to the other position that you don't need to justify it - it's only representation.

SH: There's a fundamental difference between writing about beating someone up and going out and beating someone up. Sometimes the former even appears to be more disruptive in the eyes of those in power.

MD: You could say that a liking for representation of violence is pathological.

SH: But perhaps if I didn't read or write about violence I'd behave more violently.

MD: So it's cathartic.

SH: I'm entertained by representations of violence. In my fiction I like to mix up violence and didacticism. Some people find this shocking. I think it's very funny particularly when right-on lefties and other wankers get upset because they've missed the joke.

KG: But, to go back to a more general point about your work, in one sense it's rather 'post modern', cynical and ironic, that your written work criticises or take the piss out of the very 'movements' (eg. anarchists, Situationists, Neoists etc.) which are closest to your own position, rather than attacking other 'movements' much further removed from what you actually support - authoritarianism, political parties or whatever. On the other hand, you could argue that this kind of self-irony is an important element of anti-authoritarian practice.

The problem seems to be how people from a different position to your own might respond to this kind of self-irony, which is only understandable to a specific audience. A further problem is, to what extent can it communicate anti-authoritarian ideas outside an anti-authoritarian milieu?

I suppose I'm returning to the question I started out with, of your work appearing to be addressed to a particular clique.

SH: Well, that's because the audience, no matter how large it may be, is finite. Similarly, the people who see my work aren't some kind of abstract mass, they're

specific individuals. Therefore when I'm writing something, or putting together a graphic, I think of how very specific people will respond to it. From some people I want positive responses and from others negative responses. But whatever the reaction I'm looking for, I'm trying to get a response from flesh and blood individuals. To me there's a danger that if you aim the work at what might be considered a more general audience then you'll end up addressing nobody at all. It's because what I do is intended to communicate certain very specific messages that there's an interest in it beyond the handful of people I think about when I'm actually producing it. If

you're trying to communicate something then you have to be very aware of the person or people receiving your message. And I'm looking for a response, for me it has to be a two way process. I'm not interested in writing books for the sake of writing books. If there wasn't an audience for it then I wouldn't bother to produce the work.

Finally I'd disagree with you when you imply that I only attack the things that are closest to my own position. I attack, or at least highlight, authoritarianism within myself and the things that are close to me but I also criticise many individuals, groups and things, which are far removed from any anti-authoritarian milieu.



"The Festival of Plagiarism", installation views, Transmission Gallery, August 1989.



# POSTCARDS FROM POLAND

## The Colour of Memory and an Ambivalent Narrative

by **LORNA J. WAITE**

"The READY REALITY, pulled out from life has appeared - and it has become possible to incorporate into a work of art by a decision, gesture or ritual; this is presently much more fascinating and much more powerfully real than any artificially CONSTRUED or ABSTRACT entity, or than Breton's surrealist world of the MARVELOUS."

Tadeusz Kantor

"The aim of the ORANGE ALTERNATIVE (orange is not red), as noninstitution, as nonart, is to break the fear of the militia in peoples hearts"

Stawomir Monkiewicz

WARSAW | MAY 1989

A sense of place can quickly transform into a rupture between that which is expected and that which is concealed. The metaphor of Poland, in the western media, is both a means to conceal the consequences of postwar nation/state politics based on desires in conflict with a political economy based on the free market and an attempt to seduce and persuade the majority of the illusion of democracy and the myth of self determination within the power structures of capitalism. Democracy is freedom, freedom is Western, the Poles want

freedom, they want Western democracy - such is the simple logic of western consumerism aided by the global altruism of Bush and the brutal arrogance of Thatcher's trade union politics.

Writing on Poland therefore becomes an act of solipsism where culture relativism is important in understanding western rhetoric towards Eastern Europe and the strategies available within Eastern Europe to overturn the hegemony of the ruling elite within state socialism.

Poland becomes the young child dependent for its economic future on the successfully manipulative generosity of the western governments, the availability of which is meant to signify the prosperity intrinsic in that particular form of government.

Such is the propaganda from the west in the attempt to use the "reformist" period, or compromise period to foster the conditions within Eastern Europe which mimic the imperialism of the global market within western capitalism.

Throughout Warsaw, Polish flags (red and white vertical) fly from domestic households to state buildings. In contrast to

the celebration of Polish identity, red and white banners comprising eight separate pieces which when assembled together create a public testament to the fortitude of the worker as a socialist realist type, grace the side of buildings, remaining visible from a distance of up to half a mile. MAJA (May) is emblazoned above the pictorial representation of the heroic symbol of Soviet domination. Elsewhere in public squares Solidarity banners freely signify the presence of the opposition in the lead up to the forthcoming elections - the tokenised opposition as only 35% of seats in the Sejm can be contested by Solidarity candidates. Is the partial redistribution of power by the state apparatus a strategy for involving Solidarity in sharing culpability for the economic problems which run deep throughout the infrastructure of the country? Is Solidarity engaging in power politics to the detriment of the working conditions of the majority?

Power is paradoxical, multilayered, consolidated through the appearance of fragility - Jaruzelski's refusal of the candidacy of President signifying a recuperation of strength through a display of false diplomacy and astute manoeuvring





The reception of art from Poland exhibited in the West has been one of exoticization which ironically replicates the same power relations as regards control of the product as is the case with the gallery system in the West. Witness the state control of the Polish Realities show in Glasgow. Bereft of the political context deserving of some of the work, it bore the hallmark of an occasion for mutual congratulation of the part of city officials.

Outwith staterun galleries, small independent galleries exist which define themselves as outside the institutionalisation of culture. The Foksal Gallery in Warsaw is such a space. Situated in a back street of Warsaw since its conception in 1966, it represents itself as a space which is non-institutional, refusing a commercial status and thereby defining itself in opposition to the devices which are meant to appeal to the market and the broad public conducive to a pseudo-artistic or elitist aura.

By self-defining the space of the gallery as outwith the ruling elite of the political or artistic institutions, a free form of marginality is thereby chosen - the creation of an 'avant-garde' organization is established which is continually reliant on progressive self-reflection as a form of critical activity which supports the radical consciousness it has supposedly shaped for itself. This radicality, aligned to purist notions of the universality of avant garde activity and the superior value of the artistic fact, becomes not ideology but intellectual reaction. Culture in practice preferring the superior status of art therefore explores social issues and social life from a position which evades the words CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS POWER, proletarian or otherwise.

Post 1968, greater freedom (less risk of punishment by the state) was afforded to what was perceived as the avant garde in Poland. Perceived by many as an attempt to subdue ideas which were intrinsically formulated to undermine the stabilized structures of the country, a differentiation between the avant-garde and the pseudo avant-garde was created. The Foksal, determinedly seeking the authenticity of avant-garde activities placed itself in conflict with what it perceived to be the state's recuperation of the motivation towards change intrinsic in the avant-garde gesture. Consequently, the language which is spoken is that of art as a movement negated by ideology and the pluralism of a cultural policy adopted by the state which neutralises radicality by forcing divisions amongst those for whom art is culture which can transcend hierarchical divisions within society along the parameters of class or empirical reality.

#### WROCLAW - ORANGE ALTERNATIVE, CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT

SOLIDARNE  
SPRZEDAJEMY  
WIADOMOSC

With Solidarity, with consciousness, with knowledge.

*Polemical phrases graffitied across a large wall upon which a mural, signifying empowerment, permanently stares. Resulting from a collective action organized by the Orange Alternative the militia are unable to remove the messages which tease the state and confront the ruling elite*

with messages which are not overtly confrontational but resist defamation by the police on account of their locality. The mural, situated on a church wall requires the permission of the church to remove. As this has not been granted, the mural remains - a symbol of the divisions between church and state, Pole and Pole, institutionalised art and forms of resistance which are a collective expression of the conditions of daily existence for the majority of Poles. Antagonism to the state is expressed in a manner which does not require a theory of avant-garde to address nor human spectator with a gallery.

The mural, which completed, had an audience of over two thousand people on the first day. Representing one of the forms of activity which have a permanent, visible presence signifying cultural opposition, the mural is a microcosm of the issues which dominate both the civil and economic life of Poland. dollar signs, exposing the absurdity of the economic system and the devaluation of the zloty, through the dependence of western hard currency, are juxtaposed against depictions of the state police holding flowers and smiling.

In a small flat in the centre of Wroclaw, members of the Orange Alternative discuss the value of created situations as a form of participatory antagonism which involve not just those concerned with the use of art as a strategy for resistance but by the very nature of their conception, involve public display which reveal the means of alienation without alienating those for whom the daily fear of the police is still a living reality. Downstairs, near the entrance to the flat, a photograph of Josef Pilsudski is proudly displayed. Responsible for the creation of the independent Polish state in 1918, Pilsudski is accorded the status of national hero, responsible for the only period in twentieth century Polish history when the Poles were not subject to domination from its geographical neighbours. From 1795 - 1918, due to the partition of Poland, the country did not exist on the European map.

The Orange Alternative, initially conceived through the involvement of artists, has attained a popularity in Poland which is almost synonymous with the status of a youth movement. Defining themselves as Socialist surrealists, the context of their 'happenings' is one of exposing the absurdities of the rhetoric of the state through concentrating on the means of social control and the inability of the communist regime to provide a level of existence which can satisfy the most basic of human needs - hunger and sanitation. The redistributive function of the state and its consequent incompetence resulted in the happening "Who's Afraid of Toilet Paper". In a Street in Wroclaw, single sheets of toilet paper were graciously distributed to passersby. This event and the social injustice basic to its understanding can only be comprehended if one realises



that in Poland toilet paper is a scarce commodity. In cafes, museums and in numerous other locations, it is either non-existent, or queues form in front of a table behind which a person will give the user two sheets of hard, grey paper for twenty zloty.

The Socialist surrealism of the happenings combined with an anarchic dissidence permeates the form, content and telos of the numerous happenings organised by the Orange Alternative. Undoubtedly a mass movement in which up to 13,000 people have participated, the interventions into the processes of state control recall events from Polish history and experience which are reflected back through the public display in a manner which is both defining and suggestive of the divisive nature of monolithic truth under state communism.

Events which entailed mass demonstrations through the streets of Wrocław with participants wearing cardboard tanks in the streets whilst helping the police to direct the traffic recall experiences during the second world war when the stoicism of the Poles fought back against the superior military equipment of the Germans. Yet the occupying power in this instance possesses the same identity as that of the Orange Alternative. It is by collectively and subjectively re-creating the nature of civil disobedience, of violent action and an agitational politics that the apolitical surface of the Orange Alternative is exposed. The quality of refusal of nonalignment with the politics of the main opposition and the consequent fame of various individuals within it characterizes all the actions of the group. The intervention does not take place in the art gallery, factory floor or within the space given to the official opposition; it is in the streets in a form which will exist on the periphery of official culture with no telos other than its irreducibility to a desire for power within the system in which it is the artifice.

*The surrealism is implicit in the disguises, outfits: hats - as pixie, gnome, cardboard tank, policemen - the activist as live actor, joker - this is not a master - slave dialectic, but a use of objects which have no prestige either within academicism or the museum - consequently they are unnameable and heretical, acting as a mirror to truth of oppression without inviting a violent response. The participant need not be a militant worker.*

Easy parallels could be drawn between the form of the Orange Alternative and ideas expressed by the surrealist and the situationists in the West. By drawing such parallels, the specific sociohistoric context of each is neglected at the expense of presuming that the inevitable consequence of activism constructed in such a manner will inevitably be co-opted by the engineers

of the freemarket at some indeterminate time in Poland's future. Although the marginality of the Orange Alternative is an attack upon the hegemony of the authorities, it is more careful, subtle and does not at present take place within the same structures as the economy of the West. Greater tolerance may afford it a more comfortable role. However, the mass support it receives at present and the empowerment which it creates within the imagination of a great number of people combined with the reluctance to adopt an easily nameable ideology reflects a solidity of purpose based on the present not on the gains to be made in the future as a result of present meanings. The future remains an expectation which cannot be assured, reminding of the imposition of market law and the unrepeatability of power memories within the state apparatus concerned with reform and the role of the worker.

It is a tragedy that the state will of course, perpetuate it in a way which it is more fearful, authoritarian and destructive than that in the West. Interpretation can only take place within the context of the action itself in the particular conditions which exist at that time. It is the history of appropriation within an advertising culture which influences the response of the westerner.

#### DEPARTURES

What I find important at this point is the integration of a great many suggestions devised in such a way that the spectator experiences a feeling that it is impossible to grasp and interpret the whole from this point of view.

In this case reception takes place by means of reflection that results from the correlation of objects and activities which are neither a work nor a material embodiment but landmarks or stays of the mental and spiritual processes.

TADEUSZ KANTOR

"The working class can acquire some degree of class power only if it formulates its class consciousness; the intelligentsia, on the other hand, can make its class power secure only if it refuses to formulate its class consciousness or if that is impossible, if it merely assigns it a heuristic value and guards against drawing any ideological conclusions from it. For that reason the intelligentsia is extremely diffident about its own power. For its sake the intellectuals cling to the notion of a unitary culture, centred upon a 'constructive', hierarchical value system derived from a universal concept of man. It is this value system that stands guard over the social consensus, proclaiming a collective, anti-individual ethos, defending the integration of roles within the personality, warding off every ironic attempt to relativize values and

identifying culture with high culture; for the intellectuals recognise only art and science as culture and fence off the knowledge of other classes, which is lumped condescendingly into the category of everyday life and so defined as nonculture."

George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi

The cultural politics of colour revealed through the signification of...

red as - the Polish flag and the flux of geographical boundaries, the imposition of Soviet domination, the blood of anti-abortion displays in every church refusing a space for the bodily autonomy of woman, the colour of a Solidarity banner...

...non-ideological action, collective subjectivity based on the economy of need desiring cultural change within the irrationality of thought, outwith monolithic power structures...the possibility of transformation which has no word for itself... The politics of colour create visual impressions in the mind like tourist snapshots, which reveal the complexity of significance...

red as ...the abundance of Polish flags like gestures of hope and the denial of the flux of geographical boundaries throughout recent history, the imposition of Soviet influenced State Socialism.

The redness of pain and suffering connects to the celebration of martyrdom? From the profusion of flowers which surround the politicised shrine of Jerzy Popieluszko, replete with Solidarity banners and messages of international support from other Trade Unions recognising the reality of class struggle irrespective of the governing, a curious denial is evident. Besides political banners desiring freedom, stands the pervasive anti-abortion display exhibiting a viscosity which refuses a space for the bodily autonomy of women within the state of the church. Where is feminism within this patriarchal, political structure?

Orange as 'non-ideological' action based on the identification of a collective subjectivity which understands the history of oppression through control of food and the distortion of Marxism.

Recognising the need for 'art' to offer possibilities of gestures which empower outwith the monolith of the state system, actions take place which confuse the language of the state police and cultural corporations.

A sign of life is the dissolution of rationality (surrealism equals above reality) which becomes a will to power through the subversion of received meanings which create a form of dissidence in which the language of the action is ambiguously cultural.



# REVIEW: HERE AND NOW

Here and Now magazine appeared in 1985, the journal of a discussion group which had been meeting regularly around that time, although the core group had been active in publishing booklets as the Calderwood 15 and in setting up Glasgow People's Press (now defunct) (1). With the break-up of the Clydeside Anarchist group into a myriad of tendencies, the need arose to develop ideas at greater length and depth and to attempt to oppose the false distinction between 'theoretical' and 'political' activity. The Here and Now collective left idealism at the door and aimed to face up to certain 'truths', such as the ineffectiveness of political activity: **"It is our aim then to identify and examine dynamics operating, both in our society and others. We wish to understand WHY things happen and why certain things DO NOT happen"** (editorial to issue 1). The editorial to issue 6 confirmed the ongoing project: **"When we started Here and Now we were concerned to emerge from behind the barricades of Left tradition and gaze unblinkingly at the wreckage beyond. What we see is a wasteland being sold to us as paradise. What we hear is the misappropriation of liberation in the service of the economic..."**

Here and Now is not just a magazine for its own sake, but is the result of a collective undertaking and as a spur to discussion. The production of the magazine rotates between the Glasgow group and the West Yorkshire branch, most members of the latter having previously published and disseminated free texts under the name of the Pleasure Tendency (2). The setting-up of informal groups is encouraged and responses to all kinds of issues; from cultural, 'celtic', Eastern European, to workers disputes.

The theme of the recent issue is the "Subject/Citizen" dimension, and it is somewhat ironic that given the central importance of free and public space to political/cultural praxis that so little feedback is generally received. Despite this, Here and Now has been quietly influential on the margins of the re-introduction of radical debate, with particular reference to Glasgow and of the scope of concerns around the Free University group - an informal and formal gathering of individuals who are interested in taking ideas beyond the academic prison that specialists assign them to, but also in trying to move beyond traditional leftist

interpretations, in the re-distribution of knowledge and in encouraging self-determination along libertarian lines. The existence of Here and Now as an important part of this, and against the backdrop of a 'failure' on the part of libertarian projects, indicates not pessimism but that there is a much more considered critique developing which is, if not immune to, then not too cynical to be inactive regarding modern society's recuperative capacities in negating counter-constructive interpretations. In addition, the visibility of alternative news sheets such as Counter-Information, (which is distributed in the thousands) maintains an urgent role in giving international reports and news on various fighbacks and disputes - locally, nationally and internationally - the kind of everyday struggles you don't get to hear about. So long as power wages a battle against humanity, then resistance will emerge, so the importance of putting people in touch with such resistances need not be stressed enough. It makes sense. Common sense.

Here and Now, and The Pleasure Tendency take up ideas which are post-Cardanist and post-Situationist, but apply them to the context of today's post-modern, leisure-based capitalism. The roots of the critique are diffuse, but it is not a misrepresentation to trace most of it to the critique of traditional Marxism undertaken by the Socialisme ou Barbarie group in the 50's centred around Paul Cardan (Comelius Casoriadis) and ideas on self-management. The basis of today's libertarian impulse may seem obvious to re-iterate but it was a fundamentally significant one in the context of the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of revolutionary struggle (based upon an industrial working class being led into revolution by a vanguard party). SoB maintained an analysis simultaneously and inevitably feeding out of (and vice versa) the critique of everyday life of Lefebvre and of the Situationists - that the mere modification of the means of production (i.e. collectivisation) was not enough to liberate the individual and free society. The now moribund idea was that the majority of people have no control over the decisions that most deeply and directly affect their lives, added to which were the changing patterns of production and consumption, how technology was beginning to shape peoples lives, and in the new alienations it threw up. It was through

contradictions in this that people might begin to question society and rise up against it. The critique therefore was not only aimed at the point of production on the factory floor, as it were, but was cultural also which today translates into the persual of 'meaning', the construction of identity and in discussions of gender.

It is no comfortable ghetto of self-righteousness that most leftist retreat to when the going gets tough (i.e. when the answers don't present themselves) that concerns Here and Now. In a lengthy article titled "Language, Truth and Violence" (Here and Now 7/8) Frank Dexter criticizes pacifism and feminism for their misguided assumptions about 'violence' and the confusionism that results and subsequently prevents any realistic discussion from taking place re power relations. On the subject of confessional sexual politics, he says:

"Talking-seriously-to-each-other-about-ourselves seems to be an equally 'sordid obsession' with more than a hint of self-indulgence to it, especially when accompanied by obsequious pandering towards feminism. Woman can be forgiven for not always responding approvingly when such performances include familiar patronising references to how much nicer and less 'competitive' woman are. Indulging this sort of breast-beating about 'our own emotional and personal inadequacies' can suggest inverted spiritual boastfulness". Such a situation is further complicated of course when supposed feminine virtues of being less competitive are embraced by some feminists and then used as an argument against discussion because women are already in an oppressed position. Dexter went on to quote Dworkin on the equation of the sexual act of penetration with that of an act of violation, an absurd and confusing argument which Dexter says men have failed to contest (from a partisan position, I may add). This is not just due to a failure of nerve on men's

part but lies in the whole atmosphere around which things are prevented from being spoken - that men should not criticise women, that assumptions about men's sexuality have already been arrived at without the involvement of men, a situation which ends up in the satisfying conclusion that men are afraid of women's sexuality. This prevents any further progression in the

matter as does the accusation that any point made is 'just a very male thing to say' (which might be perceived by men as a very feminist remark, so we're doomed if we do, doomed if we don't). I am reminded of an occasion at a Free University meeting where a pre-text by Dworkin was read out after which the men retreated next door to have their own discussion about their reaction, an atmosphere if not already prohibited by awkwardness and contrivance, was further made ridiculous by their reporting back to the women's group amidst repressed mockery, any conclusions they had arrived at. I personally question the sincerity of most present. For some men, to feign sympathy or understanding about a women's experience by admitting your complicity thereby attempting to excuse yourself from criticism and responsibility is far too easy. Male apologism is the flip side of the chocolate button of self-delusion which some, though most, feminists confirm through their position of not criticising other feminists for the greater good of sisterhood. This fails to contest the fact that women are just as competitive as men. The assumption that mens sexuality is something of an 'unmitigated evil' results in an anti-sexual stance from both men and women, or outright non-consensual aggression in sexual relationships.

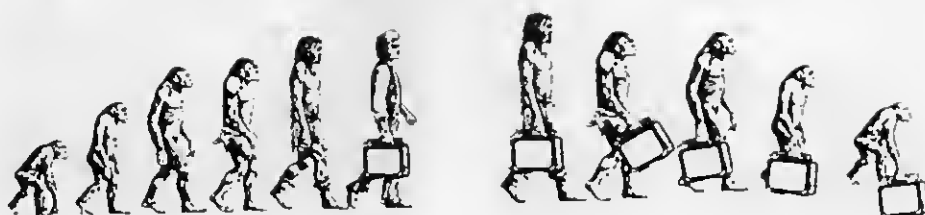
Such a focus on one article perhaps unveils particular problematics on my part but it does illustrate the breadth of issues or degree of engagement which Here and Now provokes - the use of texts to be challenged and to be taken up in discussion.

The recent issue seems more topically issue-based. "No Poll Tax Rebellion" supports the decentralised, direct-actionist aspects of community-based resistance federated through the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Such local opposition has largely failed to fall under the complete control of such groups as Militant to manipulate it for their own ends. It has, as Jim McFarlane suggests, outflanked "The 'Duke of York' tactics of Labour and trade union token opposition to the poll tax - leading it up to the top of the hill only to lead it back down without a fight". Local groups have fostered confidence through their high-profile activity (street and door-to-door leafletting, public speaking), and encouraged the participation of many not usually inclined on 'taking a stand' (i.e. it is not just politicians). It's one struggle fighting the poll-tax but it's another in resisting the manipulations of the media, the Labour party and the Tories (for example, claims on both sides that refusal to pay is nothing unique in comparison with non-payment of domestic rates prior to April 89, thereby attempting to demoralise or undermine a conscious movement of non-payment. Whilst anti-poll tax activity might have the advantage of politicising some individuals, a generalised form of social struggle, as McFarlane suspects,

has been pre-empted by certain long term factors: the control of Labourism, belief in Welfarism, city planning and segregation of the population:

"What the authorities realise is, that a culture based on anxiety, fatalism, pre-occupation with personal factors, social atomisation, a diet of trivia and spectacular events, is a culture predisposed to change which centralises power and institutes means of checking the population of Orwellian design."

The collaborationist policies of the mainstream left are also apparent in Charter 88's call for legal reform on the curtailment of civil liberties, a call not for change but, as Martin Walker and Les Levidow claim, attempts to rest power back into the State through the illusion of democratic reason from the bourgeois left and the belief in the benevolence of the British State. The writers claim that Charter 88 ignores the collective struggles of the past to defend civil rights - the 1381 peasants revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists, and the anti-fascists of the 30's - and ignores those actions today which are necessary to make any change at all in the governmental state structures that





perpetuate creeping oppression - actions arising out of community bases, collective struggle, as well as strikes and direct action tactics. Despite its false optimism, the article perhaps overlooks the fact that in general people do not rise up against that which oppresses them - they take the example of blacks picketing police stations - significant for sure, but widespread no, (but then it wouldn't get much press coverage). Nevertheless, it does expose Charter 88 as a move reflective of the selfish individualism of today:

**"In this society, while the state claims to protect civil rights, in practice it can truly guarantee only those of private property - the right to own, buy and sell. The current regime in particular has systematically invoked individual rights to attack the social rights of collective struggle. Charter 88 accommodates this political shift by proposing unity on the basis of individual rights alone, while leaving social rights for later consideration. It is no surprise, then, that Charter 88 diverts attention from the terrains where collective protest is being criminalised. The document represents the vain wish of the professional middle class to protect itself from similar attack, as individual citizens, while keeping their distance from those social groups already attacked."**

The privatisation and atomisation of the citizen dimension is facilitated in those simulations of democracy and participation we encounter with growing frequency. "The Claim of Right for Scotland", (put together by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly) aims to reinforce present socio-economic structures of the State by bringing government closer to home (as if being ruled by similar accents changes the tone of your voice). When the whole issue of self-determination is not manipulated by the SNP, it is manipulated by other bourgeois nationalists and outright opportunists who believe that a nation resistant to the Tories and proud of its repressed identity is actually something more than that. The facts would suggest the opposite. The situation of a country under the rule of another suits many opportunists in Scotland who make a career out of the pacifying persecution complex that afflicts Scots. The fact that Scottish Labour continually rest on their laurels at each national or local by-election and then continue to enforce policies and act in a manner which at any other time would have been anathema to its supposed historical roots, and that this is accepted again and again suggests that Scotland is more conservative than most left-wing types will admit.

Peter Suchin's report on the Situationist show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London illustrates an absurd but fine

example of reification - where radical ideas and persons of that movement are turned into objects of consumption via the fetishization of artistic artifacts.

Here we no longer have a drift with our radical past, but now as a packaged tour with a dull voiceover giving us selected highpoints, the icing on the cake, which whether consciously or not, undermines radicalism by illustrating the remains of that movement being an art-based one (rather than as a movement of confrontational politics, a claim which might equally be contested). Curators, being the soft cops of creativity, have achieved their goal with this exhibition, as a "neat curatorial accomplishment" as Suchin puts it. He makes the observation that: "Mock radicalism as consumer choice appeared to be what the I.C.A. (like the Beauborg in Paris) is all about. The situationists had a theory of art and, or rather, of its dissolution and to find their texts and art objects placed in a gallery/museum context is surely a strong contradiction... This is History and History is that which resides in museums - the dead things... To take the situationists seriously is to realise that their critique of 'everyday life' is by no means 'out of date'. It is not a fashion item..."

Despite these comments, Suchin could have been more scathing in his criticism, but there are some merits in this exercise in the sense of possibly popularising some situationist ideas, for as Tom Vague has put it, the situationists did not have access to a secret knowledge of the world and that is the function of Vague in "putting Situationist ideas into palatable form". Individuals who find some ideas useful here, as one will find other ideas equally as useful in forming an overall critique of society, will salvage that which they find most appropriate, interpretations often having different results. I still find a lot of situationist ideas useful and perceptive, even today, despite Debord's obscure egotism and Vaneigem's hedonistic nihilism. Perhaps more useful than the art exhibition, is the accompanying book of early situationist writings, given the difficulty in obtaining some of the S.I. material. This travesty of history at the I.C.A. however, is not lost on Vaneigem, who wrote in "The Revolution of Everyday Life" in 1965; "the value of an old work of art should be assessed on the basis of the amount of radical theory that can be drawn from it... the artwork is less important than the process which gives rise to it."

In "An Insomniacs Dream" Larry O'Hara gives a perceptive and witty expose of the techniques of youth programming with reference to Night Network, though it's applicable to all the other undifferentiated dross that passes for television innovation: for example Club X and Rapido. The off-the-cuff gimmicks employed in these programmes are simple devices to distract from a fundamental lack of content - camera angles, tumbling logos, statistics,

and street-wise yuppie presenters; "jumbled images becomes the central social space, the site of credibility, the locus of style". Glamour replaces content. O'Hara continues:

**"What was truly radical about Night Network was its attack on the disgraceful cummyn that the young have short attention spans - the programme assumes they have none, and need to be captivated by conjuring tricks... Youth is the apparent audience (but)... The real focus is on well-heeled 'youth', illustrated both by the plethora of 'consumption opportunities' pointed to and the adverts in some of which so seamlessly merge with programmes you only realise they are such when the prices of clothes comes up on screen...(but) a substantial part of the audience, that with financial clout is intended to be the post-teens seeking to, and this is it, simulate youth, recapture it."**

Anyone with any qualitative selection capacity when it comes to TV watching will find such programmes unbearable to watch even when you want to just switch off your mind. However, O'Hara is no Luddite and realises that the Media, like everything else, is 'peopled' and that the far left must engage with that. The project of social liberation is not outside of all this - words like value, meaningful content, and social responsibility has to be reclaimed - or introduced into - the proliferation of electronic media today.

**"Stylistically such programmes have a hidden code, by constant inversion seeking to replicate the fragmentation of meaning we all experience. Daily life is increasingly confusing, with symbols referring to symbols referring to simulacra... Is this to be accepted or challenged, that is the question facing us in the satellite TV dawn."**

Late-80's, service-based, image-dominated and banal consumerism and the totalising psychological environment makes any change seem inconceivable. It is in understanding the situation that we are in now, and how we got here that is of importance before attempts are made to get out of it. In the questioning of accepted truths, a capacity to act and to struggle can be regained. Here and Now is a contribution to that.

Calum MacIntyre

#### NOTES

1. For a brief recent history of Clydeside anarchism see Jim McFarlane's article in Edinburgh Review no. 83.
2. See "Life and its Replacement with a Dull Reflection of Itself", "The Subversive Past", "The Return of the Moral Subject", and "Thesis against CYNICISM". Write: The Pleasure Tendency, P O BOX 109, Leeds LS5 3AA.

# ALEXANDER TROCCHI

## and

# PROJECT SIGMA

by **HOWARD SLATER**

It runs contrary to Alexander Trocchi's notions to connect Project Sigma to him alone, as if it were his personal creation. This contagious attitude is prevalent in our society which grants the 'cultural worker' the mantle of 'privileged producer' who provides a cynical societal system with some form of conscience, whilst reinforcing an 'acquisitive nature' by being in 'possession' of his/her own 'output'. Trocchi and Sigma were not so naive as to overlook this parasitic process; the Sigmatic revolt was to adhere to principles of anonymity and hence subversion - Sigma itself was to avoid 'clear definition'. This problem of definition has given rise to a mis-representation of the Sigma stance at the expense of a clear understanding of the opening sentences of Trocchi's initial essay...

"As soon as it (revolt) is defined it has provoked the measures for its confinement."<sup>(1)</sup>

Trocchi illustrates here an issue that has engrossed revolutionary groups: the question of organisation and the difficulty in popularising core theses. Arising from this, the Sigma writings also highlight problems pertaining to the role of intellectuals and artists in any movement for concrete change - the procrastination of intellectuals and the danger of elitism within an artistic affirmation of individuality. Nevertheless it is clearly important to associate Trocchi with ideas and tactics fundamentally more far-reaching than the British literary 'underground' scene of the 60's was capable of coping with. In an unpublished essay on the 'history' of Sigma, reluctantly written, Trocchi says....

"...various individuals...have judged it to their advantage to break with Sigma and to

exploit Sigmatic techniques for immediate personal gain...almost inevitably, they felt bound to justify their lack of integrity...their obvious tactics were to identify Sigma with myself personally, plug the desperate dope-fiend with his head full of bats with vampire proclivities and Bob's yr uncle."<sup>(2)</sup>

Elsewhere in this manuscript Trocchi, almost writing to himself, says that it would lack integrity to respond to such smears with "pitiless public exposure". More saddening that this wrangling is the misfortune of having to talk of Project Sigma in terms of Trocchi the individual rather than as the invisible 'meta-categorical' revolt of history that Trocchi related it to.

To date the only documentation on Project Sigma comes in the form of Jeff Nuttall's **Bomb Culture**, a book that deals largely in terms of personalities whilst avoiding coming to terms with more applicable tactics that would lead to a thorough negation of society. Nuttall reports Trocchi as saying "What this (Sigma) is all about is a complete rejection of everything outside that door"<sup>(3)</sup>.

Throughout his book Project Sigma is distinctly linked to Trocchi the personality, its demise is the fault of Trocchi the junkie. This mood is sketched by Nuttall when he chronicles the meeting at Brazier's Park (2-5 July 1964) where an expectant panel of sympathisers awaited Trocchi's inaugural address only to be kept waiting by Trocchi who had miscalculated the quantity of LSD he had taken the previous night. This to Nuttall signifies the beginning of the end. Despite Tom McGraths attempts to "fill-in"

there seems to be little understanding of the phrase "Invisible Insurrection", no identification with it as a non-hierarchical statement<sup>(4)</sup>. In its place was substituted, once more, the philosophy of "leaders". In a lucid passage from his essay, an apt epithet to this meeting, Trocchi identifies himself as an egotist, extending this identification to all wo/men...

"What is to be feared is no wo/man's egotism but the common failure to recognise and accept it. For it must be accepted before it can, at least, in its more vulgar manifestations, be transcended."<sup>(5)</sup>

This lack of awareness leads not only to a misunderstanding of Project Sigma but can be applied to revolutionary groups and those who identify with such theory: hypocrisy can flourish where unrealised egotism and competitiveness lie. Trocchi...

"The readiness with which competitive impulses shatter solidarity and render action fragmentary and ineffectual is most discouraging."<sup>(6)</sup>

It would be counter-productive to attempt to sum up in few words the activity and plans of Project Sigma as piloted by Trocchi. Difficulties arise in actually ascertaining the extent to which some of the minor projects were developed; such knowledge lies in the hands of those who participated and they would be quick to point out that Sigma remained a blueprint. Unfulfilled as it was Sigma can be seen as the 'underground' movement that showed greater potential than most operative in Britain in the 60's. This potential can be partially located in the fact that Trocchi was



acquainted with a variety of counter-cultural movements as well as with individuals working in a similar direction. Sigma's more popularist, non-selective attitude served to increase this potential by means of encouraging a wider breadth of engagement.

This scope shown by Project Sigma is related to its identification of definition as limiting and can be contrasted with some politically motivated grouping who, designating themselves as the 'elect' give rise to a disciple-like membership. From the outset Project Sigma was to recognise itself as an exponent of 'cultural revolt', an area where self-criticism and 'tree'-thought are given greater room...

"So the cultural revolt must seize the grids of expression and the powerhouses of the mind. Intelligence must become more self-conscious, realise its own power, and, on a global scale, transcending functions that are no longer appropriate, dare to exercise it. History will not overthrow national governments; it will outflank them. The cultural revolt is the necessary underprinting, the passionate sub-structure of a new order of things".<sup>(7)</sup>

I am in danger here of separating cultural from political revolt, when for our time the development of a global and psychologically repressive capital has meant that combinatory endeavours are crucial. The cultural revolt that Sigma adjoins itself to can be identified as being based in a broader criticism of society, one that takes into account subjective tendencies and "conditions of living", finding primary orientation in a "critique of everyday-life" and the drive towards autonomy and self-responsibility. For Trocchi and Project Sigma the danger of a purely political revolt lies in the restrictive coming to grips "with the prevailing level of the political process", an occurrence that hinders the pursuit of Sigma's intended 'coup de monde' becoming caught up as it would in a more traditional 'coup d'etat'. Political revolt also suggests a number of anachronisms, not least the view, in many 'marxist' circles, that revolt must seize certain key positions under the illusion that 'power' is located centrally therein. Trocchi...

"We are sure of our own power as something which is to be realised, not seized....in ourselves...now..."<sup>(8)</sup>

Trocchi rejects the confrontationist tactics of 'classical' theory in favour of more realistic methods in tune with contemporary developments that see a relocation of the 'terrain of struggle' away from the dominant 'workerist' base into society as a whole. The Sigmatic revolt was to be a ubiquitous 'outflanking' that would make wo/men themselves conscious of their conditions, eventually undermining the effectiveness of the institutions that have ossified around them. "Men make their history themselves" quotes Trocchi, but he by-passes Marx and Engels whose adherents have since shown their intention to preserve 'inherited' structures. Trocchi...

"If you want to change things, to alter radically the relationship between wo/man and wo/man, between wo/men and society, you go a very strange way about it if you proceed in such a way that, directly or indirectly, you re-affirm the validity for now of institutions which are of the effective substructure of the status quo."<sup>(9)</sup>

An attitude such as this is not concerned with preparing for power, instead Trocchi's invisible insurrection aimed towards activating a collective involvement that would dissolve the circuitry of power, superseding present alienation by encouraging wo/men to "become responsible for their own biographies". Trocchi saw such a task as incompatible with the outmoded practices of the 'left' political parties and splinter groups whose awareness of differing levels of oppression was /is slight, their non-dogmatic interpretations rare. In Trocchi's day this was not as apparent as it is now, thus Sigma must be recognised as belonging to that current of contestation whose critique can be placed on the 'vanguard'. Trocchi's acknowledgement of the idea that the creative impulse has placed people in direct conflict to the prevailing mode of organization links up with the revolutionary drive towards concerted action as represented by 'wage-workers'. The 'avant-garde' concern over the division between 'art' and 'life', 'culture' and 'politics' leads it to adopt the same aims: the overcoming of social separation. Sigma as part of the 'vanguard', at least by virtue of its theory, was uncompromising in its rejection of 'alien society' and astute in its recognition of official opposition as subsumed. For Sigma there can be no limits to the processes of change and development as long as there remains outlets for a variety of criticisms and in this respect Sigma echoes the desire for a truly human activity to be made possible beyond the boundaries of a reified reality intent on maintaining a repressive status quo. For Sigma, history is a perpetual state of incompleteness...

"Sigma is a word referring to something which is quite independent of myself or of any other individual, and if we are correct in our historical analysis, we must regard it as having begun a long time ago".<sup>(10)</sup>

The choice of the word 'sigma', a mathematical symbol denoting 'all' or 'the sum of' emphasises the Sigma attitude: the words ambivalence and intriguing qualities make it unidentifiable with staid responses, complementarily binding it to an anonymous movement that was to hopefully 'snowball' and progress through participation.

The most immediate tactic employed by Project Sigma was the creation of an "International Index" - later referred to as "pool cosmonaut", a phrase resulting from Trocchi's description of himself as a "cosmonaut of inner-space". The International Index was to serve as a tool to "unite mind with mind", a means of channeling the dispersed energy of individuals into a reservoir of 'talent' and cognitive power that would fuel the insurrection that Sigma was attempting to instigate and nurture...

"It is the fact of the existence of this international pool of talent and its evident availability here and now that is the ground of our cautious optimism."<sup>(11)</sup>

In order to generate enthusiasm and outline basic themes an on-going series of written works were issued under the title Sigma Portfolio. Trocchi's initial essays, **The Invisible Insurrection and Tactical Blueprint**, appeared as S.P.2 and S.P.3 respectively and have often been printed together identifiable as they are of being "the most comprehensive expression of the basic attitude underlying the whole Sigma experiment". Trocchi's other contributions to the portfolio include S.P.5 **General Informations Service**, a further of situation and tactics; S.P.4 Potlach, an attempt to set up a non-elitist inter-personal log that would collect "an international underground body of opinion beyond conventional limits"<sup>(12)</sup>. The Lettrist International, of whom Trocchi was a member, issued an information bulletin of the same name from 1954-57. The Sigma **Potlach** can perhaps be taken together with S.P.1 **The Moving Times**, a broadsheet/poster featuring the writing of William Burroughs issued in Tangiers. **The Moving Times** was to have been displayed in underground stations but rejected as it was by London Transport it was mainly flyposted in galleries and cafes. Both **Potlach** and **The Moving Times** can be seen as lending practical weight to Trocchi's polemic against publishing which





**I'VE**

**GOT**

**MINE.**

he sees as soliciting only conditioned responses as opposed to the "vital flow of informations" predicted for both **The Moving Times** and **Potlach** whose ingredients would encourage greater engagement with their content as well as being free of the "censorship" of publishers. Sigma was to acquire its own printing-press to increase the issuing of **Portfolio** and the 'poster-perversions' of **The Moving Times** and linked to this Trocchi stressed the need for a "supply of important informations previously withheld from the public".

Trocchi's other contribution to the **Portfolio** is **Manifesto Situationiste**, S.P.18, his own development of a tract issued by the Situationist International (1957-72) (13). Trocchi was a member of this group until he withdrew in the early 60's. In 1958 they issued the following statement on the Construction of Situations...

"The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term 'livers' must constantly increase." (14)

Trocchi makes malleable this tactic by connecting it to a foreseen rise in automation. This technological "innovation" if correctly harnessed, could Trocchi believed, emancipate people from the necessity of production, heralding a redefinition of work and the release of what he calls "Play Value"...

"Thus freed of all economic responsibilities, wo/man will have at his/her disposal a new plus value, incalculable in monetary terms, a **plus value** not computable according to the amount of salaried work...PLAY VALUE. What is becoming is 'Homo-Ludens' in a life liberally constructed." (15)

For Trocchi the construction of situations is tantamount to a "serious game" that would "raise the whole tenor of daily-living beyond the level of stock responses" (16), with situation making as a context from which to gain an awareness of our conditions. This ties in with Project Sigma being a promoter of 'play', urging others to be alive to the dangers of a 'leisure-time' that is as coerced as 'work-time'. It is the idea of play being able to create a tension between what is and what is possible that attracts Trocchi and Sigma, play and experimentation being a viable means from which to work on 'solutions' to manifold oppression independent of the 'conventional economic framework'. A society that knew how to play would give

rise to an idea of life as a journey of discovery, with individuals being able to take control over their own lives.

The Situationists, one of a number of post-war 'experimental' groupings carried out their activities from a similar footing believing that life should be lived and 'frozen thought' suppressed. Their relevance to Trocchi and Sigma lies in mutual recognition of desired 'ends' with many instances of overlapping 'means', not least of which being the 'meta-categorical' approach. (We cannot discuss the theories of the Situationist International here as this would entail the introduction of a variety of individuals who, like Trocchi, were at one time connected to it. Simply 'defined' the SI could be seen as the convergence of 'avant-garde' practice with the post-war re-analysis of Marxist theory). In Trocchi's **Manifesto Situationiste** he recognises the need for a revolutionary solution to "our infinitely complex age of crises", taking up the 'avant-garde's' citing of the need for a collective concrete creativity involving the realization of poetry in a poetry of acts. Dutch painter Constant, involved with the COBRA group and the SI, states in the magazine **Reflex**.

"...artistic creation finds itself at war with the existing culture, while simultaneously announcing a future culture. With this dual aspect, art has a revolutionary role in society." (17)

Trocchi's "cultural revolt" does not correspond to a creativity that is stultified by "a civilization that draws the line between life and art", but to a revitalised, direct and collective art that informs life. Thus Trocchi adds...

"Alongside the art of the individual, sigmatic culture would inspire the art of dialogue, the art of interaction." (18)

This revitalisation of art implies a move into realms previously foreshadowed by 'Marxist' reliance on the 'political' and the pursuit of 'power': now the urban, the environmental, the biological, the sexual spheres all react to broaden the goals and illustrate the depth of understanding needed to effect any successful change. The American poet Michael McClure contributed an essay entitled **Revolt** to the **Portfolio** S.P.21, arguing here that revolt is a biological necessity...

"Revolt happens when the mind and body and almost voiceless tiny cries of the tissues rebel against the overlay of unnaturalities frozen into the nervous system." (19)

Here revolt is not primarily linked to economic conditions and this divergence makes it clear that the predominance of any single issue over others acts to mutilate the attempts to alter the structures of society. In turn Trocchi draws our attention to urbanism criticizing architecture as a purely functional "art-form" geared towards reinforcing conventional attitudes and behaviour. The SI, the Lettrist International, COBRA and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus all worked at one time or another with architectural ideas, the SI calling for the building of a city that would attract dissidents of all countries. Trocchi's links with the continent would most likely be the inspiration for Sigma's plans to work in a similar direction: the **Portfolio** contains an outline of a collaboration between Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price for a "consciously constructed environment", S.P.11, as well as details of Cedric Price's **Fun City Project**, featuring as S.P.31. Elsewhere Trocchi sees his **Sigma Centre** as providing space for spontaneous architecture.

As could perhaps be gathered it was Trocchi and Project Sigma's intention to realise a whole range of projects that could have made a dramatic effect upon the political and cultural life of Western Nations. This grandiose claim can be substantiated if we consider the prevailing mood of 60's agitation as one of "positive utopia". The character of the May events in Paris testifies to this. Here the movement towards collective learning, 'self-management' and overt participation demonstrate again Sigma's position within a far more combative current. It shares with the Paris insurgents a pressing need for change; Trocchi repeatedly refers to "getting started before it's tragically too late", and his own urgency is communicated by his many plans for Sigma, plans that appear to develop from one another in rapid succession. One such plan, that unfortunately did not reach fruition in a Sigma guise, was the formation of a **Sigma Centre** or Spontaneous University, "a non-specialised experimental school and creative workshop". The **Sigma Centre** was to be characteristically multi-focal...

"A place, then, in London, to be found in the immediate future. From the beginning we shall regard it as our living-gallery-auditorium-happening situation where conferences and encounters can be undertaken, contact with the city made, and where some of our techniques, found objects, futilities and publications can be exhibited, it will be our window on the metropolis, a kind of general operations base for the whole project." (20)



The Sigma Centre was to be an instrumental component of the 'cultural revolt', others were foreseen to take root in other countries close to capital cities so as to exert a stronger influence by becoming focal-points of contestation. In his *Invisible Insurrection* Trocchi sees the Sigma Centre as developing more in relation to medieval universities where intellectual ebullience and innovation were encouraged, rather than to the universities of the day where a narrow view of learning is in operation. Trocchi...

"The universities have become factories for the production of degreed technicians."<sup>(21)</sup>

It is worthwhile to note one or two of Trocchi's criticisms here: today's universities are inextricably linked to the social-political system that finances them, this system's view of itself as complete removes any trace of critical process from learning, this lack of critical process adds to the reinforcing of the dominant social-relations. One such characteristic invested in by these social-relations is the "competitive impulse" and Trocchi sees this as encouraging students to be "clever tacticians" and hence perpetuating, in one facet, the domination of appearances. In retaliation the **Sigma Centres** were to initiate a "community-as-art-of-living", rejecting any academic encumbrance such as increases in staff and buildings in favour of the revitalisation of learning as a continual process of inter-action between individuals. A fixed curriculum would be replaced by a loose 'form' arising out of the "spontaneous generation of the group situation", where the sense of community that arises is as much a part of any intended educative aim. It was hoped that the dissolution of hierarchy by communalism would encourage a critical intelligence rather than an intelligence that operates with 'ulterior motives' in mind. This implies that the university established by Sigma would take on a 'laboratory' function where...

"conventional assumptions about reality and the constraints which they imply are no longer in operation."<sup>(22)</sup>

Contrary to many endeavours of this kind Trocchi and Sigma did not underestimate the influence of social-relations upon would-be participants, viewing it as imperative that these relations be combatted before any future developments could take place...

"Within our hypothetical context many traditional historical problems will be recognised as artificial and contingent; simultaneously we

shall realise our ability to outflank them by a new approach".<sup>(23)</sup>

Following on from this Sigma was to encourage people to "discover what they themselves are about", an acknowledgement of widespread ignorance existing beneath a sheen of technical sophistication. Trocchi...

"We must do anything to attack the enemy at his base, within ourselves."<sup>(24)</sup>

It is individuals, conditioned to respond and think in certain unquestioning ways that Sigma must reach. This is not to suggest that those working for Sigma were paragons radiating true consciousness; the meeting in Braziers Park illustrates an egotism in nucleus members surely generated by competitive impulses. R.D. Laing in his Sigma Portfolio contribution **The Present Situation S.P.6** draws attention to his domination of social-relations over the activities of wo/man citing Heidegger's phrase "the worst has already happened" to illustrate the alienation and separation within society and the psychoanalytic tendency to exacerbate this condition through objectification of the "human subject". Laing's work with the Philadelphia Association and his attempts to establish a Therapeutic University for schizophrenics was greeted with enthusiasm from Trocchi, who also proffers the notion of individuals as being prevented from an understanding of themselves by the very networks they are dependent upon.

The **Sigma Centre**, then was to have been as much an experiment in community and personal inter-action as an anti-university. Michael de Freitas (Michael X), himself involved in Sigma mentions in his autobiography the intention for Sigma 'members' to live in the Sigma Centre with their families. The Black Mountain College experiment (1933-52), acknowledged by Trocchi as an antecedent, was founded upon similar lines. A valuable connection between the two was provided by the poet Robert Creeley, himself a teacher/practitioner at Black Mountain, whose essay **An American Sense** was number 26 in the Portfolio. This piece is largely concerned with the American Poetry scene of the late 50's, but draws wider conclusions than its subject suggests. Within his essay Creeley rallies against the insistence with which critics attach predominant importance to form, subjugating content to fixed patterns in a manner suggestive of a fear of possibility. This mode of literary criticism corresponds to the denial of experience as it is institutionalised in all sectors of society. Creeley includes the following from fellow poet Charles Olsen...

"We are still in the business of finding out how all action and thought have to be refounded."<sup>(25)</sup>

The fossilization of meaning and relationship reacted against here find similar expression throughout the Portfolio. A further reason for Trocchi's 'tentative optimism' stems from just this incidence of cultural groupings "Instinct with the same principles", we have already mentioned the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals, others mentioned by Trocchi include Bertolt Brecht's Theatre experiments and the Semantic City at Canissy in France. Still following the same theme it is interesting to note that Sigma Portfolio 28 was a printed circular from the Castelia Foundation, a group involving Timothy Leary.

In an unpublished diagram that outlines possible outlets for Project Sigma Trocchi makes reference to several British-based groupings that could feed into "Pool-cosmonaut". One of these was instigated by Joan Littlewood (see above) whose "Leisuredome", as Trocchi calls it, relates to Sigma's attaching importance to ambience and environmental possibilities....

"We can take care that the structural features of our Sigma Centre are geared toward and inspiring of the future as we imagine it."<sup>(26)</sup>

The afore-mentioned Therapeutic University was another such scheme that would provide "talent and goodwill" to the Sigma Project. Trocchi was particularly keen to give an outlet to the views of "anti-psychiatry" within the project, partly for reasons of their approach to society: an angle with roots firmly latched onto beliefs in the "interiorisation" of capitalist social-relations. Trocchi's further intention to campaign for a liberalising of the drug-laws and to take steps towards redressing the hysteria that surrounds their use found support in "anti-psychiatric" circles with qualified doctors prepared to lend their discoveries to such a campaign. A letter, "HM Government and the Psychedelic Situation" was to be sent to Jennie Lee MP, and a book, "Drugs and the Creative Process", involving William Burroughs, R.D. Laing and Trocchi was to have been published by Heinemann.

This diagram also includes John Wesker's Centre 42 and John Calder's Writers Nights as other possibilities for reciprocity, despite the criticism metted out to them within the Sigma Portfolio: Centre 42 for its parochial qualities and the

Writers Nights for, in the words of Marcus Field, their promotion of "meaningless word games in the name of culture". The Sigma Centre, indeed the whole project, was to tread a fine line between such legitimacy and a more uncompromising position. In his *Invisible Insurrection* Trocchi uses Centre 42 as a springboard into outlining a more fundamental approach than that shown by the 'insularity' of Wesker's views. Trocchi...

"Our university must become a community of mind whose vital function is to discover and articulate the functions of tomorrow, an association of free-women creating a fertile ambience for new knowledge and understanding...the university must become a living model for society at large..."<sup>(27)</sup>

The last phrase is important in relation to intended Sigma aims and tactics, themselves showing greater oppositional insights than both Wesker's and Calder's groupings. Here we see an example of Trocchi's subversive technique whereby Sigma would use society's own mechanisms against society: the system's worship of "individual genius" and "innovatory talent" would be deflected in such a way as to attract society's attention to these individuals who would not be working for themselves but autonomously as part of Sigma's "community of mind". The involvement of respected intellectuals would be one way of lending legitimacy to the work of Sigma and it was hoped that the Sigma Centre (re: Sigma) could attain a form of "cultural monopoly" arising from an increasing number of artists, writers and intellectuals defecting to Sigma. This itself would force society to respond to a Sigma of such concentrated intellectual power, eventually leading to a position where the platform advocated by Sigma would provide startling contrasts to conventional 'autistic' society. Sigma's influence would be felt as a result of its attempt to "discover and articulate the functions of tomorrow", for example, Trocchi's insistence on the arrival of 'leisure-society' as an area that the Project would be most suited to deal with.

Following Trocchi's diagrammatic outline we can see developing from the Sigma Centre (re: International Index) a number of directions that legitimately promote the Project whilst retaining subversive methods. **The International Cultural Engineering Co-operative** was an attempt to maintain these methods by means of Sigma becoming a self-supporting 'company'. Finances would be generated by the sale of cultural produce and profits would be 'invested' in expansion

and research. Such tactics may appear to be highly suspect and it is with regret that there can be no solid accounts of such endeavour as a functioning practice. As a company Sigma foresaw many openings for infiltration: as **General Cultural Agents...**

"we shall be in a position to recognise new talent long before the more conventional agencies, and, as our primary aim will not be to make money, we shall be able to cultivate a young talent, guarding the young person's integrity."<sup>(28)</sup>

This agency would enable the 'creators' to by-pass the 'administrators' and to have more of an involvement in the way their work is presented. Integrity could be preserved by maintaining outlets for all Sigma work therefore removing the destructive character of competition inherent in the cultural sphere. Along with the **Agency** Sigma would also deal in patents, interior design as well as establishing what Trocchi calls a "**living-gallery**". The "living-gallery" connects up with a further proposal **The International Collection**, featured in the Portfolio as number 30, this was to be a collection of manuscripts, paintings, sculptures and rare books donated by Sigma supporters and offered for sale; this collection included a complete set of the magazine **Merlin**, edited by Trocchi in Paris, 1953-57, a complete set of Jeff Nuttall's "**My Own Mag**", and a Wittgenstein first edition.

The "living-gallery" was to be situated in the **Sigma Centre** displaying the work created therein and is coupled to what Trocchi calls the **Box Office**, a showroom in the City. (Premises in the St. Pauls area of London were to be negotiated). Other areas to be explored by Sigma as "cultural engineers" include Trocchi's **Card Media Plan**, the printing of paintings and slogans on a variety of popularly used cards and his further intention to negotiate with **Radio Caroline** for a night-time slot from which to disseminate information about Project Sigma. Though there is little documentation in these areas we are to presume that the subversive content would be a development from that of the poster **Moving Times**.

Further means by which Sigma was to generate revenue can be seen in their intention to become **General Cultural Consultants**, providing counsel on a wide range of artistic matters from staging plays to advising those wishing to build a picture collection. In this capacity Sigma would also negotiate with large companies, exploiting here the need for corporations to appear benefactor. Obvious compromises may well have ensured from such 'monetary' activity, but it is as well to

keep in mind that the sale of "cultural artefacts" acknowledges the "commodification" of the imagination, and that such sale has as its end the financing of a base, a 'neutral zone' from where Trocchi and Sigma could promote the insurrection of a "million minds".

The principal aim of this article has been to counter too close an identification of Alexander Trocchi as a 'literary figure' who, according to John Calder, was using Project Sigma "as an excuse to avoid getting on with a sequel to *Cain's Book*"<sup>(29)</sup>. This attitude discredits Trocchi's attempt to initiate a "meta-categorical" practice in its reaffirmation of 'specialisation' with John Calder adding that Trocchi could have been the "outstanding writer of his generation"<sup>(30)</sup> were it not for his addiction. Sigma was to have been active in the relocation of creativity as multi-disciplinary and non-privileged removing the mystification of genius that is the denial of imaginative potential in all people. In the light of this aim to be 'outstanding' in any 'field' is a doubly retrograde step, enforcing hierarchy and categorisation and further legitimising the competitive impulses that Trocchi saw within Sigma itself. A close reading of *Cain's Book* reveals its authors later refusal to engage his creativity in such a role...

"I'm all the time aware its reality and not literature I'm engaged in."<sup>(31)</sup>

This explains Trocchi's privately adopting for himself the description "Contemporary Pamphleteer" locating himself within a less definable milieu more fitting to his views on writing as hinted at in *Cain*. Here Trocchi believes that writing should be "judged solely in terms of living", so as to testify to its authenticity, heighten its validity and help to develop a self-consciousness that is engaged in deciphering a reality that is increasingly revealing itself as "fiction". Writing should not be referred to as "literature" as this circumscribes the imagination within a welter of "received ideas" recuperating any potentially subversive qualities by its position within a set of references already sanctioned by society.

Trocchi's pursuit of "reality" is an acknowledgement that imagination can come to be inscribed upon the "environment" without the aid of a specific medium. Project Sigma draws upon such a 'creative' tradition recognising the need for solidarity in any struggle to surmount existing parameters...

"...on a conscious level, we shall achieve very little without solidarity. Theoretically, internationally, in a loose and passive way it exists. But in



practice in any urgent concrete situation it has always been most difficult to inspire and quite impossible to sustain."<sup>(32)</sup>

Many aspects of Trocchi's criticism are surprisingly contemporary: the rejection of work, the realisation that wo/man will be driven to revolt through an awareness of their own powerlessness rather than through the impact of material deprivation, as well as the recognition of the alienating character of organizing into parties. However, this is not to claim that the plans for Project Sigma were perfect, far from it, as with most schemes it would have benefited from serious collaborative attempts to render practical what remained theoretical, testing the strength of the concepts, and making tangible their contradictions. Yet even as a 'blueprint' Sigma was criticised, one or two of those involved tend to discredit Trocchi and discuss his 'theories' in terms of his addiction, avoiding the issues at stake. So it has been my purpose to redress this approach by accentuating the positive nature of Trocchi's plans while suggesting that Sigma's failings may just as well be the fault of those participants who could not recognise that their own competitiveness was encroaching upon their will to collaborate.



## NOTES

1. "A Revolutionary Proposal"; City Lights Journal No. 2, 1964; P.14.
2. "Sigma History"; Undated Manuscript; P.5.
3. Jeff Nuttall, "Bomb Culture" (Paladin, 1970); P.210.
4. See Tom McGrath's "Remembering Alex Trocchi"; Edinburgh Review No. 70, 1985.
5. "Sigma History"; Undated Manuscript; P.9
6. Ibid, P.10.
7. "A Revolutionary Proposal"; City Lights Journal No. 2; P.15.
8. "General Informations Service"; Sigma Portfolio No. 5, 1964; P.8.
9. Ibid P.2
10. Ibid, P.1
11. "Sigma History"; Undated Manuscript; P.3
12. "Potlach"; Sigma Portfolio No.4, 1964; P.1.
13. For a fuller account of the Situationist and Lettrist Internationals see Stewart Home, "The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War" (Aporia/Unpopular, 1988).
14. "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" included in the Situationist International Anthology (Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981); P.43

15. "Manifesto Situationiste"; Sigma Portfolio No. 18, 1964; P.2
16. Ibid, P.3
17. Cited by Stewart Home, Op Cit, P.9
18. "Manifesto Situationiste", Sigma Portfolio No. 18, 1964; P.4.
19. Michael McClure, "Revolt"; Sigma Portfolio No. 21, 1964; P.3.
20. "General Informations Service"; Sigma Portfolio No. 5, 1964; P.4.
21. "Tactical Blueprint"; City Lights Journal No. 2, 1964; P.31.
22. Ibid, P.33.
23. Ibid, P.34.
24. "Potlach"; Sigma Portfolio No. 4, 1964; P.4.
25. Cited by Robert Creeley, "An American Sense", Sigma Portfolio No. 26, 1964; P.3.
26. "Tactical Blueprint"; City Lights Journal No. 2, 1964; P.33.
27. Ibid, P.34.
28. Ibid, P.35
29. John Calder, "Alexander Trocchi"; Edinburgh Review No. 70, 1985; P. 34.
30. Ibid, P. 36.
31. "Cain's Book", (Jupiter Books/Calder & Boyars, 1966); P.179.
32. "Sigma History"; Undated Manuscript; P. 10.

### LITERATURE

Ever been short of bedtime reading, or atuck for something to peruse on the toilet? Well worry no more! Whatever tickles your fancy, from the humblest fanzine to weighty tomes on Bakunin's influence on the Spanish Revolution, fiction and non-fiction, from 5p to £15, its all here. We have the complete range of anarchist and related literature in print in Britain today, from all the publishers big and small, as well as loads of out of print and difficult to find stuff. For those of broader horizons, we have in stock other reading matter from across the globe, Canada, USA, Australia etc etc. As well as anarchist material, we have all your heart could desire, squatting, feminism, punky stuff, animal rights, ecology, situationist, historical etc etc.. We also have a full range of periodicals (Black Flag, Freedom, Direct Action, Open Road, Reality Now [both from Canada], Processed World [from the US]Maximum Rock N Roll, Campaign Against the Arms Trade Newsletter, the Vegan, Shocking Pink etc etc) always in stock, as well as more occasional papers and periodicals. For a full list of bumper reading (aeveral hundred titles) please send an SAE/IRC to: Ramsey, 3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, Scotland, FK8 2RD If its still in print, we can order ANY book, on any topic (from gardening to grain-haulage) that you want... Happy reading...

# CENCRASTUS

Articles // Short Stories  
Poetry // Reviews

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK/EIRE	£7.00	(£10.00)	Multiple Reader
EUROPE	£8.00	(£12.00)	
USA/CANADA	£8.00	(£12.00)	
Airmail	£12.00	(£16.00)	
FAR EAST	£13.00	(£17.00)	

## BACK NUMBERS

£2.00 each (inc p+p)  
Issues 1-20: £20.00 (inc p+p)  
Multiple Reader: £35.00 (inc p+p)

Write or Phone:

## CENCRASTUS

34 Queen Street  
Edinburgh EH2 1JX  
031-226 5605

THE MAGAZINE FOR SCOTTISH & INTERNATIONAL  
LITERATURE, ARTS AND AFFAIRS

## REVIEW:

## DE-CLASSSED ELEMENTS

**"Unemployment. Rising prices  
Never bothered me before.  
Now, struggling for subsistence  
I slowly realised my wasted years  
steeped in Ignorance"**

## VIDEOS

A few lines from John McGarrigle express with painful simplicity the feelings of despondency and disappointment, the feeling of a missed opportunity due to circumstances outwith your control; as a kid dreaming of all the things life could bring and the things you could be, only to slowly realise that this house, this scheme, this day-to-day 'coping' might be all that you will have. Glasgow was also a city of great promise, but seems to have missed the boat according to many subject to the hype surrounding its role as Culture City 1990. The relocation of a large part of Glasgow's working class to sprawling big estates on the outskirts of the city from places like the Gorbals and Maryhill must be one of the biggest mistakes post-war municipal socialism has ever undertaken, if it wasn't all carefully planned with the aim of isolating people, dividing them and grinding them down through long-term unemployment and environmental sterility. The organisation and spatial segregation of the environment is one means through which modern society structures oppression to further alienate and atomise human subjects. It would have been difficult to foresee the alienating effects that such social segregation has eventually but quickly brought, and now, the schemes have been abandoned by the Labour Party, abandoned by the trade unions, ignored by the city fathers, excluded from the city's cultural festival, and the people themselves have lost any ability to occasionally say 'no, not this time'. The Specials "Ghost Town" is a fitting, theme tune and it said more than the lyrics expressed. More recently, Pat Kane suggested a new motto for the city; "From workshop of the world to craftshop for a year". (2) This is supposed to be ironic.

"Two men looked out from their prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars" says the closing statement to "Mud and Stars" a video made by Drumchapel based group De-Classsed Elements. It expresses the polarisation in Glasgow, a city of contrasts, where grinding

poverty exists side-by-side with plush city centre developments:

**"...a city polarised between the haves and the have-nots, between those struggling to exist on next to nothing, those living with the realities of Thatcher's Britain, those with nothing to lose - dressed up to impress everyone but those who live there."** from 'Mud and Stars' video, De-Classsed Elements.

The city planners have ignored the outer areas for developments inside the centre, or what is now called the Merchant City, within a policy of attracting tourists to the city which has been fiercely promoted by the District Council since 1985. Class divisions will come as no surprise, but it is the rhetoric that accompanies this about a new renaissance and a city reborn, not re-discovered, but re-modelled in a mutant shape dictated by the ethos of Capital and the commodity. It's understandable that a bitterness has been created among Glaswegians who see all this as a PR exercise and as the foisting of an artificial culture upon them. In some cases, however, bitterness is not self-defeating but empowering, and more working class voices are speaking out and various projects are becoming visible, the publications of Clydeside Press (3) and the videos of De-Classsed Elements being parts of it.

De-Classsed Elements emerged a few years ago within a community centre in Drumchapel, which is funded by Urban Aid. Within that an Employment Project was started with the aim of giving people 'training' ('keeping them off the streets'), but rather than spend the money on woodworking or bead classes, they decided to buy video equipment and set up a print workshop in order to facilitate the expression, anger and fears of locals who would make use of it (the video equipment comprises of Lo-Band Kit, 2 machine U-matic editor with TBC). De-Classsed Elements was made up of politically-

minded individuals, of anarchist far left inclination and it was through discussions they had in the centre that the video group was built up and from which the ideas for "Drumchapel - the Frustration Game" were formulated. It was from that political base and through discussions that the script was written by John Calder, a resource worker, at the centre and main executor of the project. They are in all respects, however, independent producers and the videos receive no funding.

"Drumchapel - The Frustration Game" was made in 1987-88 and it was a response to the ineffectuality of Projects such as the Drumchapel Initiative, set up to 'revitalise the scheme', with little-to-no-effect, and it was also an attempt to confront how people were becoming de-classsed in such places, with no representation (and with no desire of having any). It exposes Drumchapel as a 'testament to failure', where the locals are brutalised by poverty and unemployment which is supposed to be disguised by a multitude of projects and layers of bureaucracy manifesting themselves in the social work department, housing, education, business initiatives, community workers; all working to conceal the obvious - that nothing is going to change under present circumstances, except go further down.

"Mud and Stars" is the more recent video and it continues in a similar polemical manner to "...Frustration Game" and is an attempt to take a look at the realities of Culture City 'from a working class perspective'. The critique is unrelenting: **"With the death of Glasgow's industrial working class we are now in an age of averageness, the day of the middle classes.... respectable, moderate, nothing-to-boast-of, second-rate, second-best, fair-to-middling, mediocre, decent and empty"**



It wouldn't be easy to dismiss such vehemence since it is executed so effectively on video, which despite having no clever structural tricks or anything which might differentiate it in the way that it is made are in no uncertain terms strong political videos, and their capacity to engage you with every word, every sordid image never falters - if you have not already left the screening throwing up your hands in horror at such desecration of Glasgow's new image. "Frustration Game" begins with tracking shots of Drumchapel to give way to static shots with unobtrusive pans and zooms of various scenes of the scheme, which despite their repetitiveness, never become boring. The sound reproduction is also of primary importance - an



atmospheric backdrop to the high rise flats and boarded up houses with a narrative read by Jean Calder which never falters in its flow. Scornful accusation is directed at the politics of reform of community groups and local authorities just as much as it is directed at the locals' resignation in the face of humiliation. "Mud and Stars" is also structurally similar - beginning with a slow track from a boat on the Clyde at the derelict splendour of shipyard cranes taking us into a tour of the gloss of Culture City - parks and art galleries, opera and theatre - "a spectacle for the few". It uses some poetry read by the authors, the aforementioned McGarrigle amongst them, but Linda Henderson's "Sideshow" presents a perfect metaphor for Glasgow.

**"They are dressing up the beggar for the show,  
covering her sores and scars with bright bunting  
scrubbing her face and hands  
and plastering on make-up  
de-lousing her hair  
pleating it with ribbons.  
Put the beggar on display now.  
For the people who count in the real world  
the world of Garden Festivals and Culture.  
The visitors will come from far and wide to gawp at the beggar in her finery.  
But don't strip her too soon  
we don't want them to see the true Glasgow  
do we?"**

The true Glasgow isn't a figment of the imagination, it's real and the facts are there for all to see. Peter Hetherington, (4) in writing an article on the publication of the "Workers City" book laid out the facts that



of the 170,000 council houses in a city said to contain the largest public stock in western Europe, 40,000 are 'at risk' through lack of maintenance while another 62,400 need urgent treatment for dampness. Overall, one third of the city's houses - 97,400 - are classed as 'below tolerable standards' The true Glasgow with over 20% unemployed overall. It is some surprise then to see culture promoted as the new industry, which means tourism - the arts are seen as an aid to business development, of boosting the confidence of the business community, of increasing property value, and improving the quality of life for a few in the city centre. Business might claim that the arts have helped to offset the decline in the manufacturing base of the city, but more realistic interpretations might say it has acted as a distraction to the realities of the present problems. According



to John Calder culture, the arts, writing, etc. have replaced real political struggle because the political apparatus does not exist to focus dissent.

A few years ago, says Calder, there were many active political groups in Drumchapel - Communist Party, Labour Party, Militant, SNP, even CND, all staging well-attended meetings from 20 to 40 people which suggests that some questions were being asked, that some resistance was there, but now, says Calder, there's no activism, no fightback, its acceptance of everything...of all the wee things that are supposed to be wee rocks that people are hanging over - the Residents Association, the Community Council. I suppose these are things that people can try and resist things with, or improve their conditions, but they don't. The people who join them are all the respectable

dross who aren't going to fight back, who are content to have tea and biscuits with the factor. They are the community worthies. Calder is one of the people who, despite having the political foresight, did not leave Drumchapel like some other activists, but widespread de-politicisation hasn't silenced him or the voices that speak through De-Class'd Elements videos.

There's no room for romantic workerist notions either:

**"The scheme is becoming more and more lumpenised. I've lived here since 1953 and I remember it being working class....people treated you with a little bit of respect. Not any longer, every street is full of dope and drink and people getting battered."**



They're not in the business of making things comfortable for people, they are not a part of the mechanism of social control that many bureaucratic community organisations are whilst using the rhetoric of social liberation, and not surprisingly, their unwillingness to make any concessions to the authorities has inevitably ostracised them.

A previous video De-Class'd Elements made on behalf of the Scottish Homes Legislation concerning the privatisation of District Council property was banned from ever being shown in any Regional Council property (community centres, etc.) because, the authorities claimed they couldn't show an anti-poll tax poster (which was behind one of the interviewees), he couldn't refer to the Tories as the Tories and couldn't talk about poverty or refer to "democracy Thatcher style", so the video was never shown.

They tried to get money from the council to make a broadcast programme to coincide with 1990 on the subject of all the different communities in Glasgow, ethnic, Irish, etc but they refused the offer of a BBC executive producer who would have acted as a gag on the politics of it. Urban Aid attempted to close them down three years ago after their evaluation because of misappropriation of funds - £20 given to Militant to help 2 unemployed young people to go to Manchester. This accusation was not substantiated when it was investigated so they were reprieved, but Calder doubts if they will slip through this time (next September) nor do they intend to. The extent of their ostracisation is displayed in the fact that they do not exist as a resource on the Social Work Dept data bank, a deliberate attempt, it is claimed, to

prevent people from going to them. Says Calder; "we exist in Drumchapel in a vacuum - we don't get on with the Drumchapel Initiative, the Social Work Department, the Housing Department... we don't participate in Youth Training Scheme, MSC or any other government scheme - except the one that gives us the money. We don't make any concrete inroads into the system".

Such a resilient position displays a political nerve rarely expressed by those working in the community sector, or by those unwilling to take a stand against the poll tax when they have nothing to lose except a 'minor' confrontation with the forces of authority in the form of letters. Such a radical conclusion couldn't fail to encompass a total critique of his own job; "Community work doesn't work because it's all about levels of control - it's their money and their rules and their games and you can't play their game because you can't win it. We called the video "Drumchapel" - The Frustration

Game" - It was originally going to be based on a game of monopoly which means you just go round and round and round, you never get to the end, you get nowhere, you finally expire in a heap of dashed hopes and dreams".

You have to be positive about being negative, but these viewpoints can't really or reasonably be contested - and that is the pertinence of the video tapes. The video workshop will probably fold as those members move on to other things, back to politics, or to a different job, or maybe out of Drumchapel if they're lucky. It takes more than an outcry of injustice to fight against present mystifications. These videos were not made solely against the Culture City label - they are for something, a fight for enrichment, fulfilment, compassion, honesty, understanding of your neighbours, some humanitarian justice, to destroy injustices, for some control over the mechanisms of life. It is those that will claim that these videos and this group are spouting the politics of failure, the bitterness of exclusion, that will

hypothesise passivity and will mystify the lies of ideology. And it is them that have the most illusions about the disenfranchised of contemporary society due to their complete ignorance about the realities of the conditions imposed upon the new lumpenised proletariat, about the price they have to pay, every moment of their lives for the production of all that.

Calum Macintyre  
Notes

- 1 'Old Young Man' by John McGarrigle from his book of poetry "Glasgow's McGarrigle", Fat Cat Publication, 37 High Street, Glasgow.
2. From "The Cut" magazine, sometime early '89.
3. Notably "Workers City" anthology ed. by Farquar McLay. Many of the ideas in "Mud and Stars" parallel that of the aforementioned book, though both were unconnected at the time.
4. The Guardian, 27 July 1988.

# Scotland's Growing Up.



Order it from your newsagent, or send £1 to Scottish Child, 17 Napier Road, Edinburgh EH10 5AZ.



IN NEW ISSUE NO.9 - 60p.

- Claim of Right For Scotland? A critical assessment.
- Mobilisation against Rushdie in Yorkshire.
- Club X and its T.V. genre.
- Situationism marketed at the ICA.
- Poll Tax, Workers Autonomy, Charter 88, Shroud-a-Fake! & much more.

Also, Back issues 1 - 6 [1985-88] @ 75p incl. postage and Double Issue 7/8 @ £1 incl. p. & p.

Subscriptions - £2 for 3 issues

Co-produced in Scotland & West Yorkshire





# VIEWS FROM THE THEME PARK #1

by **DOUG AUBREY**

Jack sat looking at the flickering screen of his word processor. Over those past few months he'd really taken to that machine - started writing and found a style which allowed him the freedom and means to edit, repeat, insert, delete and assemble words in much the same way that he'd done up till now with his chosen medium - video.

He'd given up calling what he did 'art' anymore - principally because it meant bad 'PR' and prejudice on the part of those who worked in mainstream TV or popular culture.

These days nobody wanted to admit to being an 'artist' anymore - it had too many pre-determined meanings - too many of the wrong associations and too many of the 'hang ups' associated with 'bohemia'. Everybody wanted to be mainstream - or to be seen to be part of the mainstream because it meant a certain 'awareness' - a certain 'credibility' and a certain toughness associated with being 'street wise' and more recently 'global'.

In his sparsely furnished room, objects and images were all strategically arranged. A hi-fi played - anything from classical, to punk, jazz and world music, or other stuff which he played simply for its 'production values' or because it was well 'crafted'. He'd surprised himself what he listened to now - anything from Wham to Phillip Glass went - often at the same time. A number of TV's were left constantly on and several VCR's were playing back or waiting for tape and inlaid at the ready to capture anything which caught his eye in the course of a days 'production'.

Jack like many others was always working - even when he was relaxing. Drinking meant going out to meet a few 'contacts' - discussing who was producing what and most importantly, where the

money might come from for the next production. Play meant working out in a health club, aggressively tackling a punishing circuit or running for miles out of the city into the 'urban fringe'.

That previous evening he'd recorded MTV and was scanning thru the latest music clips in fast forward. Promo-making was going through a bad patch at the moment, many promo-makers had aspirations to be feature film directors and as a consequence were never really using the medium in an effective way. Jack knew who it was who was making the best promo's now - the 'public school educated' cartel who controlled things didn't really have a clue... Everybody seemed to be playing it so safe these days - in all sphere's of cultural activity.

Elsewhere around his room were certain key images and the odd book or article relevant to a particular days activity - currently Baudrillard and J.G. Ballard were crucial reading. In front of him at the moment was an article from a fanzine-like Media magazine of a few years back: CHECK THE RIGHTS ON THE DOG CLIP. In the last year of the eighties - things had got fast. Too fast. He sometimes thought how, in less than a decade, his use of the medium had taken him from the primitive Black and White portable machines designed for use by reporters in the Vietnam War, through to highly complex computer graphic devices - designed for Military applications and battle-field simulations... Things in that respect hadn't really changed that much.

A news broadcast on the 'live' screen he always kept on caught his eye, quickly he reacted and pressed the record button. Another train crash - only this time just a few streets away. He paused and concentrated

on the aerial shots showing the extent of the disaster, then glanced out the window at the helicopter hovering overhead recording the images now being broadcast throughout Britain.

Since the beginning of the decade, when Jack began his tentative dabbling with the video medium, he'd done it all. In the early days he'd just let the tape run and undertaken crueling and often spectacular or sensationalist performances. He'd masturbated, been shot, nearly drowned and shadow-boxed with the camera-amongst other things. During another phase, he'd become almost a stand-up comic

During another phase, he'd become almost a stand up comic, performing little tricks, making supercilious comments and hurled abuse at the audience through the medium. Later when edit suites became readily available, he became concerned with structure - about how 'close' he could get to the edit, how fast he could repeat things and what point the viewer would stop looking at the image and start simply seeing a flicker... Then he started making real discoveries.

He realised how language could be manipulated by the edit>> by shuttling the tape backwards and forwards he realized how time could be effected>> by freezing and pausing he could turn a gesture, a grimace into a profound statement>>

He often wondered what he and others like him owed more to - all the paintings in all the galleries of the world? >> the written word? >> music? >> or the flickering box which had been part of their lives since before they could string two words together?>>

Jack was becoming a veteran - he'd done it all, used it all, been inside, outside, for, against the medium for the best part of a decade now...

He'd taken material to the point of absolute overload and beyond >> he'd turned often poorly shot material into profound statements via the use of video effects >> he'd flipped squeezed and tumbled reality into a void >> reaching points where all the imagery he used simply became another frame to be sucked into the machine.

A point was reached where the machine took over, it created it's own aesthetic and it's own style.

Like many others who were using state of the art technology it became difficult to tell who made what and for what reasons...

Many tape makers collaborated and became video teams - signing up with record companies or being sucked into a style obsessed jungle.

The technology had reached the point where many didn't even bother about going out and shooting material with a camera anymore >> they created shapes, objects and even nature itself on their machines...>>

Everything was reproduced - and then forgotten or stored away on data stream somewhere until an advertising agency with more money than sense found a use for that particular little 'trick'.

Then there was always the off-air sources which everybody now so readily appropriated.

Jack and his contemporaries had all reached the stage that rather than being behind mainstream TV, they were in fact two steps ahead and the gap was widening especially with deregulation now meaning a glut of poor quality cheap programmes, mindnumbing game shows, an overload of repeats from the seventies, all set alongside yet more low budget 'soaps'.

Everywhere they saw their work and ideas appropriated by youth cultural shows, by the parasites in the pop-promo world and advertising industries >> all working with three times the budget and producing nothing nowhere near as 'good'.

But then quality didn't really amount to much anymore, beyond the predictable talk around style or the latest electronic gizmo ... Many like Jack had become frustrated by the limitations of the channels thru which they made their work; rejecting the growth of the 'Video Art' Academy and the limited issues, audiences and themes of those that controlled the artschools, funding agencies, facilities and distribution networks.



An academy was taking control of things now - dominated by a few 'teachers' who looked with increasing suspicion on the activities of Jack and his contemporaries from the relative sanctity of their departmental posts and personal pension plans...

Recent major festivals in pristine institutions had emphasised the 'holier than thou' attitude of many of these ageing or frustrated academics, who on most cases seemed to turn a blind eye to the fact that they were presenting their work in the 'gentrified' warehouse galleries of dockland 'theme parks'; Places where people would come and wonder at the things they couldn't afford or look in awe at the Videowalls installed in galleries, concourses and shopping malls - all flickering with an almost 'Cathedral-like' aura and showing obsessive images or seductive ikons...

Jack watched the MTV stuff he'd recorded that night, recognizing immediately the 'style' of his peer group. Everywhere he looked now he recognized the style, techniques and 'crucial' imagery used by his contemporaries.

Some had given up on 'art' completely now, preferring to sit for anything up to eighteen hours a day in front of machines - in return for the security they had often lacked - becoming in the process wealthy, lonely, unthinking cynics... Some were bought off cheaply. Everybody had a price...

Jack had done it all - become a real hybrid 'commercial' animal. He'd made pop promo's that anybody who thought about it would call 'sexist' >> He'd applied his techniques and skills and lent his style to making adverts for youth training scheme's - which were both exploitative and created false optimism amongst the disenfranchised youth of the nation...>>

He'd produced corporate videos for Banks who were putting pressure on Third World countries to repay their debts - who to meet repayments were directly effecting the world's ecosystem by tearing down vast tracts of forest >>...at the same time he was involved with making promotional videos for Greenpeace...>> He'd always fancied doing a lager advert - lager, jeans, cars or smack, they all screwed the viewer up in the end... He'd even been involved with adverts that were so bad he'd rather not be associated with - flying sofas or logo's around the screen in tacky 15 second vignettes...

Jack looked thru his blinds and out across the wastelands and decaying housing schemes which blighted the part of the city in which he lived. His direct environment was changing. The developers had moved in, realizing that the only area that stood between the old 'merchant' part of the city and the area that



Jack lived in, was a vast tract of wasteland...

More and more of the old Victorian tenements were getting a face lift and being carved up into small, cramped 'studio' style apartments.

Security doors and controlled entry systems kept unwanted guests out, while many of the old bars in the area were getting a new sterile image. Recently the first cafe wine bar had opened and was already filled with younger, fresher, suntanned faces, who would drink there for a week or two before moving on to an even newer, more stylish place to be seen in.

Satellite dishes had become a common feature on roofs in the area and a new type of crime had been invented - with dishes now obtainable in the flea-markets and second hand electrical shops that were left around the city. The cars parked outside the controlled entry tenements were getting newer. It seemed the more people had to protect, the more security they were acquiring, which took the form now of everything from self-defence classes, personal pension plans and ever safer sex. Everybody could expect to get their car tanned at least once and along with the sound of police sirens a shrill chorus of car alarms punctured the atmosphere almost continually.

Jack could see the housing schemes standing grey and ominous on the hill. These were a constant source of interest and fascination to Jack - locations used by him in just about everything he'd ever done and recently seen as the backdrop to a number of car commercials. You could sense the desperation in these places, in the faces and physical appearance of the inhabitants, in the anger and the venom taken out on the empty houses and in the hate-filled sectarian graffiti which covered everything.

Frustration and boredom were relieved in the addictions and obsessions of the locals, in everything from scag to the explicitly violent or sexually perverse video's consumed voraciously, which acted both as a release and a measure of the situation... Everybody has a video now - irrespective of how poor, how desperate or how hungry they might be.

The local mobile video shop served their needs, touring the schemes, its heavily fortified doors and windows revealing much about the environment, which in truth resembled a scene closer to Beirut than mainland Britain...

To get into the affluent part of the city, Jack would either walk or more often than not get the train through the wide expanse of wasteland which divided his changing community from the commercial centre.

Everyday he'd look out and see the kids and dogs who seemed to live in these 'blurzones', doing what the normally did -



searching for any remaining scrap metal or foraging for food.

10 minutes from all this and Jack'd find himself sitting in a room surrounded by state of the art technology, operated by the kind of artisan who had emerged during the late eighties.

Craftsmen who could bend >> warp >> twist >> flip and tumble images in ways inconceivable three years >> three weeks >> even three minutes ago...

As New technology emerged, within days there was an expert who knew the machine inside out and a client who had 'reserved' certain effects for use at a later date...

Jack liked working with people like this - they seemed to enjoy pushing their skills in the way his work demanded. It made a change from the cynical, calculated and sterile approaches of many of the more 'professional' producers - people whose only concern and sole motivation was money and making money - the enterprising incentivising career obsessed professionally indifferent classes who had it all, yet wanted more.

Jack knew as well as anybody that to survive you had to be a 'professional' - what he fought against now was the indifference that professionalism created - somehow the money grabbing cynicism had to be beaten.

Somehow the real talent and real energy of the country had to be utilized. For that to happen he had to be even more of a professional than those who he despised, before it was too late for any real changes...

...Outside the helicopter circled overhead, still capturing the scenes of carnage streets away.

His eye caught the large glass structures of the city's biggest shopping complex, its pyramid-like shape, glistening in the sunlight and standing out in stark contrast to the fear, desperation, panic and paranoia which surrounded it.

The shopping complex stood as a monument to the new city and the 'Cultural Renaissance' which had been taking place over the past five years. The city was now able to compete as a Design/Art centre with the likes of Milan and Barcelona and it had more art galleries per head of the population than any other European city (and proclaimed as much in its Charles Rennie Mackintosh appropriated tourist brochure).

In this high-tech consumer-friendly 'Valhalla' >> in one stop you could park >> do your shopping (paying by plastic of course) >> eat a Big Mac at the drive-in burger bar and 'shop' for a film at the Multiplex cinema, watching the latest Hollywood

offerings while sitting cheek-by-jowl with the great undeveloped areas of wasteland, the largest Social Security office in mainland Britain and the Jericho-like Housing schemes which stood isolated on a hill, overlooking the complex.

The Design of this Complex was such that it became almost impenetrable on foot - unless you were prepared to negotiate the busy roads, decaying railway system, rubble-filled wastelands, strategic fences and boundary-like landscape schemes... All this before being confronted by one of the hard-faced security guards, dressed like an American cop, who patrolled the place, 24 hours a day.

At night the place was flooded with spotlights, creating a sinister military-like aura around the empty car parks. Security, scrap metal, consumer spending - these were the business which predominated in an area once famed for the craftsmanship of its Blacksmiths and Foundry-workers - that, and of course the use of the location as a backdrop for ads, art and promos...

Jack surveyed the scenes which surrounded him, it was almost as if the heart now torn from the area, had been replaced with a plastic pace-maker which never missed a dull repetitive beat.

Jack's interest in the shopping complex lay in the fact that it had recently installed a 100 screen video wall as an 'architectural' feature in it's central airport-waiting-lounge-like concourse.

He and a number of his contemporaries had been commissioned to come up with something suitable for this monster, something at the most about thirty seconds in duration - to act as spacers between the adverts and pop promos that would form the wall's staple diet ... come to think of it, most of Jack's associates were the ones making the adverts, promos and promotions for the complex itself - these days few artists - let alone 'punters' - could really tell the difference between the art and the commerce anymore...

Jack looked around his spartan room. Like most, he kept all his books, notes and archives of tapes stacked away in a cupboard. He liked to keep his head clear - concentrate on one thing at a time and refer to material when he needed to find an example of what exactly he was getting at >> searching thru his 'frame-store' of references culled from every imaginable source, looking for the right approach, the right style, the right attitude...

Again he glanced at the flickering screen of his word processor. The nineties he



thought, wondering what direction he needed to take now - everything had become a style - currently the 'in' thing was minimalism, keeping things 'lean and clean'.

The ariel shots of the train crash again caught his eye >>

Recently he'd thought about the possibility of combining fact/fiction and documentary in new ways - he'd thought about how he might be able to take on narrative structures and stories and how the technology might be effectively used ...>>

Another train of thought made him think about getting away completely from the high-tech end of things >> those new light-weight cameras were something else >> he thought about the more intimate possibility of a diary-type approach to things in a traditional 'verite' style >> recently he'd also been convinced about the potential of transferring video to film and the coming together (inevitably) of the two media...>

Outside he could see the helicopter circling overhead >> he looked back at the VDU and then across at the music clip show...>> He recognised that tape - there was something familiar about it>>> He thought about his current production >> how many generations should he go? >> how many layers of images did he want? >> should he go digital? >> What about the audio composition? - it wasn't working even though he was attempting to integrate sound and image completely >> how far could he push things?...>>

That music video, where had he seen that? >> the victims from the rail crash were at long last being freed from the wreckage >> it was the very train he normally took into the city almost everyday >> the pain on the face of the survivors appeared exaggerated on the small screen >> later he'd go back and like a hi-tech Forensic scientist study every scene, every grimace to try and find something that a normal viewer might miss >>> Outside the helicopter still circled, recording things. >>>

Jack thought: somewhere orbiting the earth now a satellite was transmitting the pictures of that disaster from the scene two streets away, back on to his TV screen... ..That music video, of course he recognised it - it was one of his >>>

all photos D. Aubrey.



# 20 Questions, or: Leaving the 20th Century (again, at last)

by JEZ WELSH

1. In an early eighties video tape, featuring the 20th Century Californian video artist Max Army portrayed a media society post modern limbo of a life style in which he left because there was nothing on TV. In my case I shall leave because there is too much on TV. Always too much.

2. For standing outside my back door on a warm summer evening in the late summer of 1987, looking down at the garden as lengthening shadows engulf it and from the kitchen the sound of the radio reaches out to me, inviting my complicity in a whirlwind tour of global culture. Charlie Guter is speaking from a street in Tanzania describing a scene of desolation and melancholy. He introduces a piece of music - a piece of music, repetitively structured, eerily harmonised music that is at once strange and familiar. I've heard its echoes in so much contemporary Western music, and its authenticity is fragile and melancholic like the ghost town of the commentary. We have spent this decade in an orgy of consumption that has not stopped at the margins of the material world. We have consumed the globe in every aspect.

3. There is no point in making predictions about the remainder of the 20th century, for a variety of reasons. If nothing else, we shall all be sick to death of hearing experts in the media telling us what it is going to be like. By the end of this year there will be precious little else to say, but predictions about the next decade, the next century. It is a promise because we know it already. We have seen the future because we have been living it for some time already.

4. It is, however, interesting to look back at some of the visions of the future from our recent history. Take for example that the computer in 2001. A Space Odyssey in the sixties we needed the image of a big computer to convey a

sense of awesome power. As we enter the nineties we are more impressed by SMALLNESS and by the time we actually reach 2001 this process should be so advanced that it could be installed as a filing in the astronaut's tooth.

5. Is there a foreseeable end to this process of miniaturisation, especially with regard to INFORMATION which has increasingly come to exert its influence over culture? Culture treated, its information can be miniaturised, stored, replicated, synthesised and amalgamated with other forms. Difference, Regionalism,ialect, Ethnicity are reduced to the status of information like so many varieties in the Breakfast section of a supermarket. We can choose to accent the process or to resist it. To resist is to refute the supremacy of Information. Like refusing to fill in the Poll Tax form. Is there a form of cultural action that can not be documented, recorded or preserved?

6. For any spectacular example of why it is necessary to resist the impulse to document, preserve and RePresent, we need look no further than the ICA's recent brush with the mortal remains of Situationism. I say Mortal remains, for the ghost was nowhere to be seen. As DeBord predicted, we are well and truly living in the Society of The Spectacle, and the Spectacle of Situationism reduced (miniaturised, encrypted) to a system of design motifs (not even visible in the perfect argument for the abolition of Art History. Situationism reduced (miniaturised, encrypted) to a system of design motifs (not even visible in the perfect argument for the abolition of Art History).

7. The perfect theory is a stratagem, disguised as an aesthetic discourse, that celebrates and seeks to encourage that which is at once profound and meaningless, or profoundly



meaningless. No documentary evidence exists that this theory has brought forth any culturally determinable artefact in either the realm of the physical or that of the notional, and so it can be said that it is hitherto in no way guilty of contributing to or otherwise perpetuating the processes of cultural production. However, now that it has been NAMED this innocence is lost, and the loss of innocence (seen as the acquisition or transfer of knowledge) demonstrates once again the destructive power of Information.

8: The fatal flaw of the Void Act Theory resides exclusively in the fact that it can be named, and thereby defined, described, measured, allocated a point at which to exist in the constellation of ideas. Those of us who have toiled under the sign of Video Art should appreciate this. Video Art is History and is even now settling (comfortably) into its new home, The Museum. Media Art is a problematic term, possibly even a contradiction. Independent Media is not even problematic, it is merely a contradiction. Media are, of necessity, INTERDEPENDENT. Video Art, Media Art, Television..... they are all somehow part of the same thing. Beyond this thing there perhaps lies something unnameable.

9: That which is unnameable belongs to a class of entities about which nothing can be said. Ideas that can be neither described nor formulated. It is at least theoretically possible that virtual technologies might offer us the chance to break free of language. (A project that Oscar Wilde might have described as 'The Unspeakable in pursuit of The Unnameable').

10: The unnameable could be the new or the so far undiscovered. One of our most pressing problems is that we think we have discovered (almost) everything and that there is nothing NEW anymore. Our loss of faith in The New coincides with the collapse of The Modern as an ideal or a goal. From a loss of faith in modernity it is but a short step to the rejection of progress, or at least a rejection of the (ideologically determined and ethically motivated) idea of progress in the social sphere. As we face a new decade and another century we must think about the choice that faces us: to accept the failure of modernism as we understood it and the consequent impotence of a post modernism is

no more and no less than the disintegration of modernism itself, and to dare to imagine beyond this point, to find the meaning and to seek progress, to rediscover the challenge of the new. Or else to accept that the process will continue, that things will remain the same, which is to say they will only get worse.

11: Recently in Yugoslavia I had a discussion with Lorn Falk, director of the Arts Residencies programme at the Banff Centre, Alberta, Canada. We were both attending a 'Video Colony' (cross between a workshop and a festival) in the south of Macedonia and were aware of two things: one, that we were looking at a different culture that might just elude out NATO frame of reference, and two, that we were aware of a crisis of ideas in the western culture we both belong to. Lorn described this as the 'Theory Soup'. You are either a noodle floating around in the soup, passive and prey to any change in the environment, or else you are something like a shark that feeds off everything else in the pot. Perhaps there is also a third category; some kind of tadpole, that is waiting to grow legs so it can get out of the soup altogether - climb up onto the lip of the bowl and see what kind of a world lies beyond.

12: In some way, Video Art has been an ongoing document of the whole process of social/cultural implosion in the eighties. When J.G. Ballard wrote 'The Atrocity Exhibition' in 1969 critics saw it as an illustration of the traumatised psychological landscape of modern man. By the eighties it did not just describe a psychological condition, it functioned as a script for a whole culture, and too much video art has been little more than a series of electronic footnotes to Ballard's text.

13: The Atrocity Exhibition is still running, of course. Not just the endless stream of actual atrocities, violations of humanity and nature, that constantly assail us from the Media, but also the atrocious spectre of the 'Death of The Social' and the abolition of 'the real', reported by Baudrillard among others. Video artists should proceed with caution; the playground of Virtual Technologies, Virtual Cultures may turn out to be a minefield, or the threshold of a new place where you have to leave the baggage of your philosophy, your morality, at the hat check. For an image, an object, an idea that exists in the virtual realm, supposedly stripped of, or indeed conceived in the absence of referents, may turn out to be a



poisoned sweet. Simulations are not developed for fun and virtual environments are not designed with the best interests of humanity in mind. Video itself was developed as a military technology and the computers we play with are a spin off from the space programme, from weapons research. We have of course already confronted this problem with regard to video and its effect upon the body-as-image. When addressing the problem of video it is no use bemoaning the fact that it causes bodies to disappear, to dematerialise. This function is fundamental to video as a technological form. It reduces the body to a ghostly emanation, to information in fact. Video surveillance systems are quite precisely devices for turning bodies into information. So the Body in Video Art can not distinguish itself from the disappearing body that is caught in the duplicitous mirror of surveillance. And when it re-emerges, rematerialises, as energy, information, it is only one element in a flux of signals.

14: Perhaps there are people in some remote place where westerners do not go, watching Sky Television from a satellite receiver, and perhaps they are not passive recipients of our cultural colonialism. Perhaps they can see us very clearly

reflected in what they regard. Perhaps they can tell us what is going on. Perhaps we can learn how to listen to them.

15: In a very short time, you the video artist, the film maker, the computer image maker, will be in a position where you can make your work available in small discreet packages for people to consume in the privacy of their own PERSONAL SPACE. Which is not to say IN THEIR OWN HOME: rather in the exclusion zone they create around themselves with the aid of headphones and miniature t.v. screens. The little private spheres that will float round in what used to be SOCIAL SPACE. This is what is meant by the death of the social. (This is also why the Beat Box, the Ghetto Blaster, is a more radical medium than the Walkman.)

16: Before the 'workshop sector' decided that it would be best occupied in providing 'training' to enable people to work in 'the media' (now who really believes there will ever be that many jobs available in t.v.) it was motivated by a desire to get people involved. Training is what is practised upon circus animals or military personnel; involvement has to do with communities. The



Jez Welsh interview for Variant Video 1989

Andy Smith "Woodyard Romance"

Sarah Downes "The Weather Outside"



involvement motivation was not concerned with professionalism in any sense, the point was that people could use video (or any other medium) to communicate, to share experience. Many of the programmes made in this way were of course very boring to anyone not directly involved, but this was not the point either. They were never made to entertain a distant audience. But when the workshop sector went professional it had to junk all those ideas of open access, it had to stop people from indulging in unstructured 'free expression' and it had to demand that if they want to say something they have to be TRAINED first. This is another aspect of the Death of the Social, for the social always grants that people ALREADY KNOW HOW TO SPEAK.

17: First there was the idea of ALTERNATIVE MEDIA whose means of production and dissemination would be separate from and constituted in opposition to the dominant form. Then there was the idea that the dominant form could be infiltrated and modified from within. Then there was the acceptance of the 'grammar' of the dominant form. Then it was assumed that because a crossover had taken place from the margins to the mainstream, the margins no longer mattered and could be dispensed with. Then the circle was closed and the idea of ALTERNATIVE MEDIA was once again nothing more than an idea.

18: Similarly, when Art has abandoned all of its old weapons - critique, subversion, irony,

ridicule, self righteousness etc. - and substituted them with MIMICRY then it has accepted that the dominance of the dominant form is so unshakeable that to parody it (and to hope that this intellectual game is transparent to the viewer) is the only form of address that remains. At this point, Art, along with the Social (and God, whose demise preceded both) can be declared dead.

19: Societies that suffer overt oppression live on bread and create poetry. Democracies live on sugar and produce soap opera.

20: The production that is the replication of soap opera has nothing to do with PRODUCTION in the industrial sense. As the whole economic structure becomes predicated upon the growth of Media, of Information, of Financial Services, of Tourism, this kind of (post) production will increasingly come to eclipse the classical model of production or Manufacture. How appropriate then that VIDEO ART (or its various offshoots) should be so dependent upon POST PRODUCTION. The precise moment of control, of simulation, of manipulation occurs in Post Production. Let us say that for present purposes, MEANING can be said to be POST PRODUCED.



# TOWARDS A NEW EROTICA

by **MOIRA SWEENEY**



**MANO DESTRA** Cleo Uebleman (Switzerland, 1985)

The London Filmmakers Co-op presented a programme of **EROTIC FILMS BY WOMEN**, in July '89, introduced by renowned experimental filmmaker Birgit Hein, from Köln in West Germany. The films presented were part of the Emerging Generation programmes, selected for the recent Toronto International Experimental Film Congress (discussed in July's issue of *Independent Media*). In response to the organisers' request for a two hour European selection amidst the breadth of contemporary work and, moreover, as a political stance against the Congress's complete exclusion of programmes dealing with sexuality, Birgit Hein curated a body of films made by young women exploring eroticism. The programme with work from German, Swiss and Irish Filmmakers, has toured Germany and North America to mixed responses ranging from walkouts in angry protest to the pomographic content, to accusations of lack of eroticism in films which apparently verged on the mundane.

Within the avant garde there have been a number of landmark films by woman attempting to explore female sexuality amidst a backlog of ultimately sexist imagery. Carole Schneeman's **FUSES** (USA, 1967),<sup>(1)</sup> presents shared camera time between two lovers in intimate and graphic representations of heterosexual lovemaking, referring to the filmic qualities of light, texture, rhythm and composition with an integrated image/fantasy possibility. Chantal Akerman's **JE TU IL ELLE** (Bel/Fr. 1974) <sup>(2)</sup> infused with a comic sensibility follows a young alienated woman through solitary and casual sexual encounters, culminating in an intense and tender lesbian lovemaking scene.

These films, and those presented in the Erotic programme are not substitutes for sexual activity, rather vehicles for female sexual expression. Along with the homoerotic work of filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger, Issac Julien and Cerith Wynn Evans, this work provides a necessary and compelling view of the

complexities of sexual desire. However, too often filmmakers in the avant garde have a tendency to deny and evade the body in anything other than it's subtlety. This is not to say these films are invalid or unimaginative but to point out that they highlight an intense dichotomy between body and soul in lyrical and spiritual works and do not deal with flesh on raw terms. In addition we have been accustomed to viewing the female embodying soft and tender values or posited as voiceless victim. The impact of early feminist exposés of this female sexual degradation in life and on the screen, has ironically created censorship around the production of sexually liberating imagery. It is therefore a welcoming experience to see women breaking taboo as the subject holding the centre of visual presence, with fantasy and sexual imagination moving from the private sphere into the public.

In Claudia Schillinger's **BETWEEN** precise images of sexual engagement with

her own body and another's are composed and edited in a finely controlled pattern, free from superfluousness. The clarity of the imagery (the pulling apart of her own vagina, the adaption of an artificial penis to her naked body, the wrenching of her partner's hair) all bring the film to an ecstatic state of tension and pleasure, moving between the imaginary and experienced. We saw the woman with the penis penetrate another body from behind, thus extending her power as 'active' subject. The sexual tension which is further built up through dramatic changes in unusual camera angle, underscored with deep sighs, is released in both a desperate and violent act of masturbation and continued in flickering imagery of touching and explicit gesture. Longing, desire and passionate engagement with the body merge, fully exploiting film's potential as a tool of fantasy.

Claudia Schillinger's *BETWEEN* is an interplay of the male/female genders, both of which are extended and distorted. Mara Matushka's films also illustrate plays in what Birgit Hein calls the *DOPPELGÄNGER MOTIV* - the split into two or more personalities. *PARASYMPATHICA* (Austria 1986) refers to the positive/negative, with the female body painted half black and half white depicting the two nervous systems; one being the production of tears and saliva, the other urination and ejaculation. Performed in a witty and unashamed fashion, these animated acts flow into one another. The solitary filmmaker performs differing scenes in a highly humorous manner: a black spec in the middle of a huge, white, deserted beach masturbating in a self

congratulatory way (ES HAT MICH SEHR GEFREUT Austria, 1987) and in a tiny bedroom, hammering nails into the wall in a statement of frustration and sexual repression.....what else can I do? (MEIN KAMPF, Austria 1987)

Regine Steenbock's *VEL* tends to empty cinemas, myself included in those not wishing to subject ourselves to fifteen minutes of filmed scalped flesh during cosmetic surgery. Stan Brakhage's study of autopsies (*THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES*, USA, 1971) <sup>(3)</sup> questions one's ability to observe the human body as mere flesh on a compassionate if not erotic level. In *VEL* the fragmented shots holding and panning over incisions into eyes and breasts are all too poignant considering the purpose of the surgery. The perverse pain in the production of 'beauty', accompanied by the film's 'soothing' text on how to alleviate pain (read by a German male) lacks any comment on wider social issues around such surgery. As is the case with all of the films presented, woman's fantasy and roleplaying (and here self-mutilation) are not detached from society's patriarchal codings, including fashion: they are nonetheless to be reappropriated, questioned or rejected. In *VEL* it is hard to see what position the filmmaker takes other than cool detachment, which has erotic potential but is clouded by confusion in this film's aims. Moreover, eroticism is not sited in the specificity of an incision on the body.

It could be that in *VEL* we are being asked to test on our ability to endure the pain which is reflected in the patient's

endurance point. The most complex and challenging film of the programme, Cleo Uebleman's *MANO DESTRA* (Switzerland, 1985) presents much more potent meaning to the speculation that 'danger at a distance' is part of our socially constructed heritage as infants, which is then brought into the realm of our sexuality. (4) The film is a long forty minutes to endure. Shot in beautiful, stark, black and white, it opens up with a dominatrix in black leather, standing in the middle of an underground industrial corridor. She is surrounded by large piping and accompanied by the sounds of clanking heavy footsteps which remain at the same threatening distance. There is in addition the haunting, wailing, music of *The Vylies* which recurs throughout the film. We are introduced to a large white basement space in which a second woman dressed in black leotard, tights and stillettos, is bound neatly in white ropes from ankle to torso in a foetal position. This woman is neither victim nor passive object. The film moves through a series of perfectly composed tableaux: the dominatrix coiling ropes in precise preparation, the bound woman set in the middle of the frame barely moving, the dominatrix tying her with great attention to detail. The dominatrix further encloses the second woman in a large trunk and a binliner. Finally, she carefully arranges on the wall, a series of photographs which record the previously filmed scenes.

While the film could be simplistically interpreted and thus rejected for its slick fetishism, this only serves to ignore the multi-faceted level on which it works. Fetishism is woven into the erotic imagination: absorbed and presented in a



MANO DESTRA Cleo Uebleman (Switzerland, 1985)



particular context, as here, it allows one to venture into the area of sexual taboo.

Every action or move in MANO DAESTRA is played with extreme composure and calmour with an air of anticipation which is never resolved, and, for many viewers is too much to bear; in previous screenings this has resulted in screams from members of the audience. The prolonged shots and the insistent banging footsteps echoing from 'behind' the walls of the room produces states moving from tension to utter melancholia in expectation of something terrible and unknown. All too easily fantasy and desire are resolved in superficial scenarios of romance or orgasm. In this film we are not given such simple pleasure to break our frustration, instead the roleplaying opens up eroticism's connections with sexual stimulation and enduring pain.

The forefronting of power and powerlessness in MANO DAESTRA has a childish omnipotence one associates with infantile being, particularly in relation to the offered foetal position of the bound woman. With the concept that eros is the preverbal union between the helpless child and powerful mother, (5) the film tenderly enacts bondage and domination, in a finely balanced exploration of fragility and vulnerability which puts into question society's necessity for preoccupations with dominance. At no moment in the film does the dominatrice attempt to hurt, nor the 'victim' resist. In one tender and poignant moment, the previously bound woman sits, untied, smoking a cigarette whilst the 'domina' massages her neck from behind. This mutual assistance, against a backdrop of anti-porn arguments, points to a distinction between roleplaying s/m and non consensual sexual aggression - the latter which Andrea Dworkin sites as the basis of all experience for women in heterosexual sex. This view overlooks the possibility of consensual sexual aggression, in particular in this case, consensual sexual aggression within the lesbian experience and only serves to exclude space for experimentation around helplessness.

Extreme views of gender difference are dangerous. To say that all male behaviour is aggressive with women never as 'villain', perpetuates the present puritanical climate of conservative sexual moralism and represses womens' need to express a variety of unexplored avenues for themselves. This said distinctions do need to be made between violence and sexual expression. Some of the women's films in last year's FEMINALE in Koln (reviewed in Independent Media November 88) work in closed and final ways in their incorporation of violence. In Karen Alder's LEHNENSIE SICH ZURICK...EROTISCHE PHANTASIEN (Germany, 1987) a woman stages cutting her own vagina (very convincing tomato sauce included) and in

Hermine Huntgeburth's ICH WARTE UNTEN (Germany, 1987) an incest survivor kills a male lover with a television set. These extreme positions again lack long term direction for women's erotica. Women experimental filmmakers do not exist in a void and, subject to the codes of society absorb 'ideas' and 'values' of male domination including violence towards women, to hopefully challenge and attack them.

Sexuality is open to artifice as well as spontaneity. The eroticism shown in the films of Hein's programme is not isolated but permeated with conflict, hostility, distress and fear as well as tenderness, love and affection. There are no simple solutions, rather a space in which to produce ground breaking work in a multitude of sexual discourses. These films highlight conflict in the mental psyche as an inevitable feature of the sexual imagination. Tormented by desire and it's indefinable nature, I am excited by the directness and urgency in them. The active flesh is something we should see more of...

This article is also published by Independent Media, October 89. Copyright: Variant/M. Sweeney

For further reading see

1. THE GENDER AND CASE OF CAROLE SCHNEEMAN Millenium Film Journal, issue 16/17/18 Fall/Winter 1986/87 (published by Millenium Film Workshop, 66 East Street, New York 10003). Also FUSES, Cinematograph,

vol. 3 (published by San Francisco Cinematheque)

2. CHANTEL AKERMAN'S FILM: A DOSSIER Feminist Review, no. 3, 1979
3. I make the point that Stan Brakhages films of heterosexual lovemaking and child brith are highly romanticised views located in the realm of the male and indeed antithesis to the films discussed here.
4. PORNOGRAPHY AND PLEASURE Caught Looking-Feminism, Pornography and Censorship 1986, p.46 (published by Caught Looking, 135 Rivington Street, NYC 10002)
5. PORNOGRAPHY AND SILENCE; CULTURES REVENGE AGAINST NATURE, Susan Griffin, p.254 (published by Harper and Row, New York)

Claudia Schillinger's BETWEEN will be screened again at the London Filmmakers Co-op in November in this year's London Film Festival. BETWEEN, MANO DAESTRA and IMAGINARY II from the EROTIC FILMS programme with tour Britain with the Film and Video Umbrella package THE BODY IN EXTREMIS

FUSES, THE FILMS OF CERITH WYNN EVANS, THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES, BETWEEN, MANO DAESTRA and IMAGINARY II are in Distribution at the London Filmmakers Co-op, 42 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1 tel 586 4806.

## Film and Video Umbrella

Promoting  
Media  
Art  
Nationally  
And  
Internationally

01 497 2236



"Electronic Dissections no.4" The Diastolic Murmurs

## IMMATERIAL MATERIAL

Central Space, July 28 & 29 1989

*Dermot Todd* is asked for something different. He serves up more of the same. 'I been there before'. Some review.

## REACH FOR YOUR GUN!

Was it Timothy Leary who suggested spending a day or two not using the word 'I'? The point being to alter one's consciousness, or at least one's perceptions. I've tried once or twice and the results are amusing.

It occurs to me that people should spend a day or so practising writing - about art, aesthetics, cooking - without using unnecessary quotation marks. Never in human history has the quotation mark been so over-used and abused.

While I am thinking, Derrida suddenly walks into the pub and, with no prompting from me, takes responsibility. I tell him not to worry about it too much, look I didn't mean to upset you, but you know how it is etc.

He shrugs and goes off into a sulk and I am forced to buy him a whiskey. Jameson's, I tell him. Oh ha ha. He downs it in one, muttering something about double-crossers.

The other thing is how the authorities, figures of authority, are dragged on, willy-nilly, to lend weight to one's argument. Either mentioned by name, or else mentioned formally, i.e. by writing in their style or borrowing their jargon. Like swearing really, but you don't have to have read The Bible anymore. There are any number of bibles. It is hard to keep up with them. How did the vogue for (silly) (usage) (of) (apparently random) brackets originate, mushrooming overnight? Or is it rather a quasi-religious ritual, the votive ceremonies of disfunctionaries?

In these grim times, in Britain, weighed down under the barrage of bullshit that comprises our casual culture, a day off now and then is called for, if undeserved. In lieu of emancipation, a holiday.

"No government has handed back more powers to the people than this one," Margaret Thatcher says to me in the pub again the other night. I nod dumb agreement and head to the bar, my round as usual. Power surges around me, lights my way as I plod down through the decade now dead on its feet.

"What you having?"

"Ah, in such an ugly time the true protest is beauty." Ha ha.

Alcohol, you and I should get together again some time, for old times' sake, let's make it soon. In these times, in quote marks and brackets, let me get quietly smashed, let it all wash over me. Leave me be for a day or two, Margaret Thatcher. Nothing personal, honest. Let me drink off my rage and, yes, live to dance on your grave. Now just let me finish this drink.

That was a week ago now. Cast your mind back a bit further. Summer; stinking summer London-style. The mighty metropolis, sweating in suits and ties. The everlasting uproar. Murder mile. A greasy kebab. Bickering. Prosperity.

For once I was sober. I was engaged as bartender at what may loosely be termed an art-function. I'm not sure how far those participating, actively or passively, would agree with that term and don't much care at this point. It's my day off. I very carefully pick through the various

wines and beers on offer in the cash-and-carry, weighing up which is best for the occasion, then take the advice of the man in charge. I am strictly an amateur. Likewise - here we huddle in one corner, speak in hushed emphatic tones - different media have their own weight, their own specifications. Each entails precise decisions and some knowledge of its special history. Obviously. Here, they're brought together, into close proximity, to observe the clashes, contradictions, strengths, uses. Light, sound, flesh, electricity, alcohol. Me on the alcohol. Observe the way I deal with the wine and allow it to breathe. Meantime:

Naked, but for a wrist-watch, glasses and papyrus leggings, the balding figure at the far end of the room spins his staff manic majorette-fashion till it's flung from his grasp.

Performance art. Yeah. Hell, it has to be. Just off the street, the casual punters roam in and roam out, those that remain chatting idly, waiting for the end, for the last lights out before heading back into the glow of the city, lit red by a blow on the head. But no one is injured after all, not even Andreas Techler. But I anticipate. You're already lost. All is confusion here. Sometimes I don't know if I'm listening to old friends or the sound of jackboots. It's a decadent time, spent doing a little dying every day for as many days as possible. Irresistible. Unassailable. On. On. Get on with it.

Central Space is a bit like Shock Corridor. A fitting venue for 'Immaterial Material', which took place over two days there late July. The







sharpen my faculties. Vague memories of images of oceans, this is one I miss.

Sort of an aesthetic Speaker's Corner. Snatches of information, enough to intrigue, not enough to satisfy. Short-term engagement only is possible. The notion of long-term forecasts about culture have all worn a bit thin.

The art underground at times seems on a par with UFO contactees, with its elaborate investment in an alternative reality, one in which a semblance of power and meaning transforms a drab world. At the end of the evenings naturally I'm left wondering where this wide open structure's led us. First, it is evidently necessary for people to forge and maintain common links, to work together, to prevent a stifling sense of isolation. Secondly, this free for all leaves the audience bemused. How do you negotiate the assault upon the senses, make sense of what's presented? Problems, problems. I've overlooked the fact that the underground is after all a closed system. So that, while we have Canadians, Germans, Britains, all on the same bill, these distinctions are not as important as the fact that the consumers and producers are largely the same people.

"The contradiction between producers and consumers is not inherent in the electronic

media," according to Enzensberger, who happens to be in the kitchen when I return home. "On the contrary, it has to be artificially reinforced by economics and administrative measures."

Right, I say as I make some coffee. The development of mass-media has resulted in a generalised suspicion of electronic technology as two-way communicative devices. The expressive potentialities of the new media are still largely undeveloped. Any understanding of what methods of production and consumption they imply has yet to be clearly articulated, either theoretically or aesthetically. At present developments occur so rapidly that the humble amateur is unlikely to be able to keep track of - let alone purchase and learn to use - the numerous devices that are theoretically available to everyone. Consider for a moment the pseudo-democracy that the term technology, meaning advanced technology, commonly carries with it. Visions of ecstasies of communication are extinguished by the reality of technical ignorance and the quarterly electricity bill - and the weight of history from Joseph Goebbels to 'Wheel of Fortune'. Forms become fascinating, later to become ossified.

Contradictions. The realm of technology seems, curiously, at least to offer the potential for multi-media interfacing - think of the tele-

phone line. In the socio-aesthetic realm there is very little indication of a corresponding development. Instead of suggesting that new tools be made to perform old tricks - the Let's Do A Fax Show mentality - its new tricks we need. Redefining the show in accordance to the media, discovering what the media can do. As it is, most are content to remain fascinated with the idea of media doing it for us - taking our place: as if we had a place to be taken - and readily accept, habitually, being imposed upon. What else could we do?

Wynne and Kolkowski, one on the violin in the stage area the other on tape/mix down in the audience, in presenting the musical group as both producer and consumer, affirm the communicative possibilities offered by new media. What's interesting about this work is that it is primarily demonstrative, formwise, the whimsical title of the piece 'Panic and Depression' notwithstanding. The performers are the audience all along, not necessarily mute.

To alter the prescribed form of consumption... unprecedented states of mind. If you don't have a filter for your coffee, says Nedjar, take an old rag.

## LOSS LEADER - RIDICULOUS OFFER

# RēR Megacorp: 11 years of Unpopular Music

We need to expand. We know some of you, tired of product, will be interested in our stuff but won't fork out on the off-chance. So, as a confident loss-leader we're offering this

### INTRODUCTORY OFFER:

1. **DOUBLE LP SAMPLER** 2 hours of music from Faust, The Residents, Art Bears, Art Zoyd, Univers Zero, Henry Cow, Stormy Six, The Work, R. Stevie Moore, Conventum, L.Voag, Aksaq Maboul, Vogel, Goebbels & Harth, Picchio Dal Pozzo, The Muffins, Decibel, Ron Pate, The Homosexuals, Feliu Gasul, Robert Wyatt.
2. **PLUS: WHA HA HA LP** (Progressive, downright weird, virtuosic... rock?... from Japan)
3. **PLUS: AIDE MEMOIRE LP** (Musique Concrete, Electronic, Orchestral from GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland)
4. **PLUS: LES FLOTS BLEUS LP** (Strange, Tuneful, Satie-esque music from France)
5. **PLUS: THE HOMOSEXUALS LP** (British PostModern NovoPunk Bricolage)

All LP's are Nimbus pressed & complete with booklets, inserts & so on, sold below cost - maybe a dumb move, maybe not... we hope.

ALL 6 LP's for £12 or \$22  
INCLUDES SEA POST (or add £16/\$30 for AIR)

Cheques in sterling only, drawn on a British bank, or sterling international money orders to:

**RēR Megacorp, 19-23 St Saviour's  
Road, London SW2 5HP UK**

# each day die with the sun I N T E R V I E W each dawn arise anew

## NOVUS

NOVUS - until recently called Flux - are a Dundee based group. They have produced 2 tapes; "In Flux" and "Opening Doors" (see following reviews). In addition, they produce their own magazine, "Views from Beyond the Horizon". They have just released a double A-side single, "Desire" and "The Muddy Stream of Emotion" (Lucifer 001). Malcolm Dickson attempts to categorise them, but fails.....

Novus are represented by Mike Kane (MK), Euan McDougall (EMc), Paul Smith (PS), Kevin Guthrie (KG), and Gerry Murray (GM).

MD "Opening Doors" I liked; you don't get to hear bands doing that kind of stuff in Scotland. I liked it because it was totally unpredictable, but also, like the kind of other aspects of things that you do - I get this kind of collective impression of the members working together, doing tapes, booklets; it's very much a self-managed unit. That's really what I'm interested in as far as my own interest goes in the magazine (Variant). I think the whole music scene just now is just so Style-Culture orientated and things that operate against that are quite positive, especially when everything is focussed on the production of commodities.

EMc I wouldn't say we are acting against it as such, we're really just doing it because it's possible to do it, there's no need to go to extremes like the business world is doing, it's just what we are, it comes through in the music rather than the price.

MD But that must be a conscious decision you have taken in response to how the dominant system operates?

MK It's dead simple, there's isn't any great thought or anything gone into it, it's just playing music and we want to get across to the most people we can. We haven't thought much about taking on anybody or being against this or that. This is the natural way to do it.

MD Tell me about the background of the band, how you came to be Flux, when you started playing?

MK Well, we've stopped being Flux; we've now changed our name to Novus...When Flux first started playing it was just me, Euan and Kevin. At one point - 9 years ago - me and Euan used to play gigs just by turning up and playing, just playing without talking about what we were going to play or knowing what one another was going to play. Then we stopped and then we started again about 7 years ago with Kevin...Paul and Gerry came along roughly at the same time because they quite liked what we were doing as well. That was about a year ago. Then after that we got Brem playing the saxophone, and Derek playing saxophone and trumpet. People just joined us, the more gigs we got the more people came along, though it's stabilised into about 7 members now. It's hard enough getting a good live sound with 7 people - it's harder if there's more, but it doesn't rule out the possibility of more people.

MD What about playing live; do you play outside of Dundee because it can't offer that many opportunities for bands of your nature?

MK Just within the past 6 months we've begun to take it more

seriously, we decided to put out a record, so once that's done we're obviously going to have to go out there and play as well, so we'll have to get outside Dundee.

PS...We handed in a tape to one pub in Dundee but it wasn't quite what we sounded like live?

MK We tricked them into giving us a gig - Chevy's (Bar Chevrolet). Then we played the Cafe Club and we got the plugs pulled out. We spent about 5 hours setting stuff up - videos, TV's, projectors, slides - and Satan's Slaves pulled the plugs out. We put the plugs back in but then they pulled them right out by the cables so the PA was fucked. After that, Chevy's cancelled. We don't find it that easy getting gigs. We've ended up playing art openings which gives people the impression we're arty - which is a bit of a nuisance, but it's the only places we can get to play just now. Even they don't like us.

MD So what kind of context or environment do you envisage as being conducive to Flux (Novus)? Do you try to project yourselves towards a certain audience?

PS Well, hopefully not.

MD You try to avoid categorisation, which is fine, but when you first started doing things there must have been some sort of musical influences there? Or was there?

KG You get influenced to a point, I suppose - I've been influenced - but you get to a point where you just see the stupidity of influence, so you just try and leave them alone.

MD Are you a collective in that sense?

PS You mean collective in that we all have the same ideas about the band?

GM There's nothing to agree on as far as live playing goes, all we do is go up and play and that's it, there's nothing else.

MK There's no discussions, we just get the sounds and play, and play for as long as we want and if anyone wants to stop and go, then come back and play, then that's fine. I don't think we're influenced by anything...I suppose the fact that we didn't want to be like a lot of things...

GM I don't think there's any attempt not to be like something. PS When people have heard it - not the band live - but the tape or the record or whatever, then they will ask what are your influences or that sounded like this, that or the other. But that's not from us - it's them that hear that influence. We don't consciously have influences.

MD Stylistically I don't make any associations myself, I was just wondering what you thought on that. But what the band does in terms of producing your own



tapes and magazine end stuff, it's like the whole kind of post-punk thing of getting 'access to your tools', the means of your production - that's a characteristic of the residues of punk, which has spilled over into cassette culture. Is that something you consciously identify with?

KG I don't think we fit into any cultural, alternative cultural, cassette cultural bracket, or anything like that...

MK It's just practical to release tapes because that's the cheapest and easiest way to do it just now. If we were rich we would release compact discs, not because compact discs are the most expensive thing, but because that's the best quality you can get. Just now, the best quality we can get is a 4-track mixed-down onto a cassette, which is also all we can afford, although we've done this record which cost a bit more because we were recording on 16 tracks, or was it 8 tracks...well, we recorded on more than 4 tracks. The photocopying of the books - that's because we can't get it printed, it's practical and easy to get it photocopied.

EMc We can also give them away. If you do books then your publisher has the obligation to get some money back.

PS It goes even beyond that, for me anyway, I mean we're not even sure if we should be making singles or cassettes, but that we should be playing live.

MK I would disagree because there's media there to be exploited. There's only 7 of us in Dundee - if we had to play to all the people we would like to reach we would exhaust ourselves physically, making a record gets across that problem.

GM It lacks spontaneity though.

EMc If you are consciously doing a recording, then obviously there's a block. If you go and play music it's just the same as doing a gig...the music is the same whether it's being recorded or being played live.

PS But we didn't just do it live and then forget about it, we did overdubs and other things.

EMc But that's just using the facilities that are there.

GM But it's not totally spontaneous then.

EMc The studio is just another instrument, isn't it?...Why not take things really simple, like what I would say Flux 1a, is about simplicity and there's no going against musical trends or doing this and that because of, we're just doing it.

MD There must be a concept of an audience in all this?

EMc No



MD Why do a record then?

GM The problem is we're more about music end creativity, spontaneity, that sort of thing, not the actual fact that you'll let people hear it...

PS Because that's just like playing live, letting people hear it, no matter whether it's on the radio, whether it's directly in front of you, whether it's tape - it doesn't change what it does when you record it.

EMc There's certain differences also between recording the music and the live presence...

MD How do you manage to sell your tapes so cheaply?

EMc The tapes cost a pound to buy.

MK We don't make vast profits. Do we make any?

E We make some profits, then there's the photocopies and photographs.

MK In the first tape we put a photograph on every one. We only sold a few of the first one as well.

EMc You see again, we don't really see the need to make money out of music - I didn't say that there's anything wrong in making money out of music but I don't see why people should be greedy about making money...

MD I see it, as part of a 'decentralised interactive method of communication', this process - I'm seeing Flux in this wider context in that other people are doing similar things, producing their own music and distributing it in their own way. I mean, do you link up with other people in that area?

MK We're not in touch with anybody - I send some to friends. KG It's a kind of like the thing that was happening a few years ago when there were loads of wee electronic bands who were producing their own cassettes, and it's a part of something which has died out...I could be wrong of course, but I haven't been in touch with that circle for a long time.

MD I think it has died out, which is a sign of the times. I reckon a lot of

bands who were doing that kind of thing a long time ago have tried to become more accessible rather than going in the opposite direction...Reading the "Opening Doors" catalogue/magazine, it comes across that some of you are talking about music as a kind of liberating force, or as a regenerative thing rather than music form/style, but also that music should be used in a provocative way.

EMc You see again, it's not music being used, it's just what music does...But when you say about opening awareness and such, I see everything as a gateway, a doorway, and music is one of those in particular which relates to humans more than anything else. But there are other things in life, in sound, out there (points to window) which can open up things, it's just how the person perceives. Current fashions in music just block any kind of awakening because they are so predictable, and the mind is really lazy, it knows what's coming so it doesn't really have to pay attention, and where there's no attention, the mind misses out on everything in life, the whole intensity of life is lost.

MD Isn't that philosophising....

EMc No, that's fact...

It's totally beyond words again, it's merely fact. You can never describe a sound 'as such', the description is merely a comparison therefore it's totally invalid, but meaning is an entirely different thing, you see the meaning of something is not to compare, to compare is to move away from meaning and to never see the actual point of music, the actual meaning of music when you compare it with other things. PS But this thing about whether it's pop music or whatever, or whether it's repeated over and over again, the sound's still there, it may be contrived to be formed into something but the sound's still there...

EMc It's corrupting perception isn't it, because it becomes memory that's perceiving...

MD People are receptive to different kinds of stimulus, I mean you're talking about a mental state there?

EMc It's beyond mentality.

MD ...So it's a spiritual then?

EMc It's just pure perception, you can call it spirit or whatever...

It's just music, sound, talking to one another, anything can spark it off. It's not that the means are methods as such it's just that where the mind is one, where there is that purity.

GM So do you think that music has more power than other



things?

EMc For some people yes and for others no. I would say it has a particular influence within the human mind because of its mystery, and that's partly again what pop music, classical music destroys - it's the mystery of music, because it becomes merely another thing that is put together piece by piece so we can analyse it and say this is how this thing came about, and the mind's like that, it misses the whole point of everything in life.

PS The thing is though, no matter what you do to come under analysis you can't control the analyser - the stuff that we do couldn't come under the same analysis as any other music or pop or whatever...

MK Which it will, now that we are recording it, have gone to the point of recording it.

PS I don't really get that bit when you say that classical or pop destroys that because once it gets into the person who's hearing it then that's when they start making preconceptions about music, not necessarily when it is coming out because in a way it's almost involuntary, it's coming out whether you systematise it or not, it's a sound.

MD "Opening Doors" is really much more free-form improvisation than the first tape.

EMc You can never say 'this is what improvised music is'.

GM The first tape does sound more like conventional music, is that what you're saying?

MD Yes.

MK That's only the drum machine because the guitars are just played as we play them now, it's just the fact that there wasn't any live drums, the rhythm was just punched in the drum machine and played back.

EMc We've heard a lot about contradictions in records than in just playing live, I just cannot see how people think like this. You mentioned contradiction as well, but what does it actually mean? When you mean play music then there is no contradiction, but if we're trying to consciously play improvised music or trying to play Novus music, then we'd be a contradiction. But we have no real ordinance. We make music.

MD I was just wondering about the decision to use the format of the single.

GM Because it's there, we don't have the money to make an LP.

MK Most bands do it just for money.

EMc If you want to reach out there's a problem because you don't get much exposure in just

releasing tapes, you can do it live but you don't get any airplay...We're against any form of reviewing music, but I also think it is a necessary step to also break down all the nonsense that goes along with the music at present. You see it all the time, bands who have something to say at the beginning and then getting management and a record deal and they change - look at the Thrash bands, they are controlled. I don't see the need for management.

MD If I tried to categorise Flux/Novus, or whatever, from the little that I know...

MK Why do you want to categorise?

MD Everybody hinges definitions onto things...

PS You can't say what this or anything is by the category that it's in.

MD There's a certain position the band takes, and its lyrics, to the world and its crushing conformity, and it's imposing itself on you.

EMc Any interpretation is made by the listener, because it's a relation between the listener and the actual sound, and it's not something that is just imposed on you.

MD You talk about people, and about 'little people' and you talk about society as a force which crushes individuals - that's not categorising what you do, your position is a conceptual one and I'm not particularly trying to pin it down, but there is a certain position that you adopt. Everybody takes a position in relation to the rest of the world and how they perceive it.

EMc That's an act of defence.

MD Taking positions?

EMc If you want to protect yourself against the ugliness and brutality of the world, but you should just see the thing and say 'right this is going on'. Like a reporter, totally unbiased (?!!)-Ed.)

MD I would think differently on that. But it also seems to do with semantics and how you define positions.

PS We're not trying to defend any position right now, sitting here talking to you and to each other. You've asked questions as a result of your interpretation of the music and what we are doing is just talking about it.

MD Would any of you attempt to transcribe what is you do in a

political way, I mean that in its widest sense, political as taking in a whole number of culturalist ideas. Really what I was getting at about Flux being self-managed and having control over your means of production - I transcribe that politically because its decentralised, it's...

PS But that political thing is just the same as interpreting it, that's allowed its interpretation. EMc It's the simplicity of it, you just look at things and see how they are and you might write a song about it - that's not necessarily drawing up a world plan. I don't see the need for government but I also don't see why we should convert the world to our way.

MD I'm not meaning that either, that you should adopt a political stance, you say it's about the simplicity of things, it's just the way things are - but it means going beyond that all the time, that's what comes across in your conversations, to push things a wee bit further and to do that means coming up against unmovable objects.

EMc It's just getting rid of all the nonsense that's inside, the simplest thing to do is to state a war or what, democracy, all causes are the same.

MD Which you would say is?

EMc What's the point of an answer, that's what politicians and religions are good at, giving you the answer, if you look for an answer then you'll get your reward.

MD I don't agree it's that simple...The system fucks up a lot of people...

MK But that's people's own fault

PS If you see someone suffering then surely there should be some form of compassion.

MK A lot of people are kept insane because a lot of people think they are helping them.

EMc...we expect others to help us recover, there's no-one who can really help you, you can relieve suffering a bit.

MD You can't get rid of grinding poverty where you don't have any choices - you can't suddenly decide 'I am strong within', or if you did you'd still not have any choices or money to feed your kids or whatever...

PS There's no need for poverty, it's not beyond humanity to eradicate it tomorrow. In a way it's up to each individual because nobody is doing it for them.

MD You don't just wake up one day and that realisation is there.

EMc You see, to wake up, to open your eyes - how many people actually open their eyes? ..We need to get rid of greed within ourselves, whether rich or poor... to give a really black and white answer, to put it all on show is in itself a danger, to give everyone an answer to every problem what's that doing?

EMc It's a challenge in dictorial statement, or is it merely open statement? If you say to me, this is the way the world is, I'd say maybe to you 'but', and the 'but' is the question. So if you want to understand people with the 'but', don't just hang on to what you say, not as a problem of understanding, people are trying to understand new things always through the old things, there's no real understanding, but if you look at the thing first time, then you see the thing. But if you look at the thing through the past, through old theories, old knowledge, how can you possibly understand, because that knowledge is the limit of your understanding and shall be the limit of any further understanding. Can you ask a question that you don't know the answer to? Put the question where you don't know the answers, that are beyond all politics?

MD You're denying a materialist viewpoint. To attain that kind of knowledge or state where you can throw off all the shackles of description, of meaning, of memory, you have to be in a fairly exceptional mental state and that comes through a process of disciplining yourself and thinking about that.

EMc There can be no user of discipline, only the used. If you are a follower of anything then who's the user? Who's the follower? Unless there's insight there can't be intelligence and without intelligence there's no understanding.

MD I find these ideas ultimately impossible concepts.

EMc It's just like the window there with the curtains, but who's put the curtains up and who can take them down? That's all our theories, policies, whatever we call them, politics, religion - curtains over the windows, it's as simple as that. Remove them and you'd see clearly.

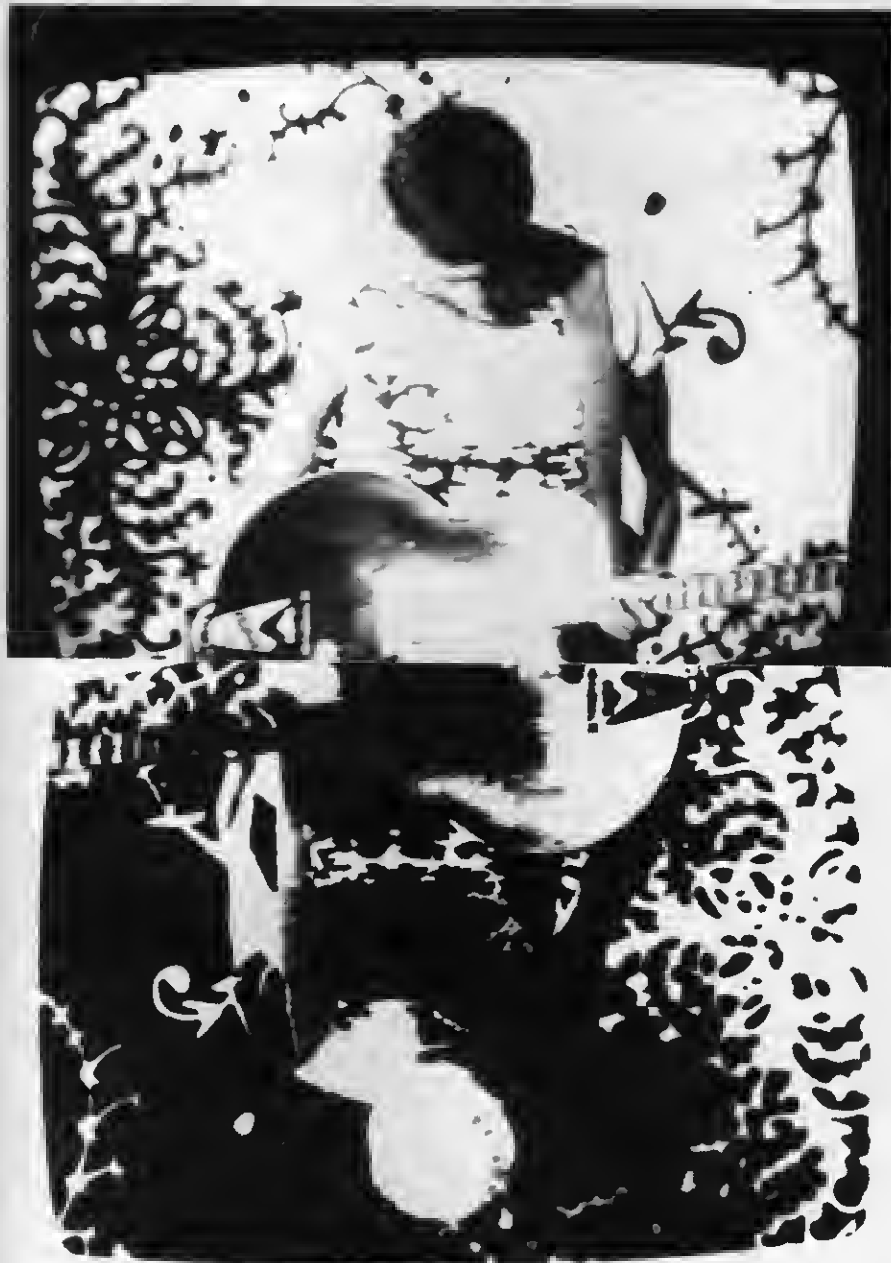
MD Absolutely



# FLUX TAPES AND TEXT: A REVIEW <sup>(1)</sup>

Flux: "In Flux" (recorded October 1987)

Flux: "Opening Doors" (recorded April-May 1989)



In the past twenty-five years, a persistent undertow to the currents of popular music has been provided by music without conventional structuring, usually played by closely-knit groups of people who are often self-taught and unskilled in the more conventional forms of music.

Several factors have been important in opening possibilities for such music-making. Not the least has been the technological development of electric and electronic instruments. This permits the sustain and transformation of sounds

which can enable a piece of music to be structured on something other than a song or chord basis. A second factor is the broader one of the invention and reproduction of youth subculture, where most such experiments are played out, both producing and produced by (generally male) peer group bonding.

These factors provide the ground in which sound experiment can grow, but are insufficient in themselves for persuading any group of friends that they should embark on such a musical project.

Experimentation is usually legitimised by reference to precedents.

In Jazz, for example, percussive use of unpitched and electronic instruments expanded from colouration interludes into a central concern in Sun Ra's percussion and electric-keyboard based music of the mid-1960's. In retrospect, that use remained programmatic (e.g. representing "Atlantis", "Clusters of Galaxies" or "Cosmic Chaos"), and the ensemble passages were examples less of any "Freedom Principle" than of a form of discipline within the group relation. However, groups of listeners discussed and interpreted these recordings, and were inspired to experiment with intuitive improvised music (e.g. in European Free Improvisation).

The separation of Rock from Pop Music in the period 1966-68 occurred around twin pressures on the pop song: a striving towards more ambitious and looser song structures <sup>(2)</sup> and elongation of solos permitted by better amplification technology. <sup>(3)</sup>

Such formal innovation soon settled into the meanderings of Progressive Rock. However, there were episodes of more promising use of the emerging technology, often at the periphery of the Rock world, the prime example being the attention paid to "Krautrock" in 1972-73 (most significantly Faust and Can).

Punk reinstated the primacy of the song form, but similar undercurrents soon reappeared: for example, in the music of Cabaret Voltaire, The Pop Group, and, most reminiscent of Flux, the post-Wire music of Gilbert & Lewis. Where these differed from those of the psychedelic wave that a reggae-influenced rhythmic base often maintained musical structure.

Such precedents can help form the shared understanding necessary for any group of people about to commence their own activity. But they hardly legitimise that activity in relation to whatever local music scene there might be. The world of the "Muso" - hanging around music shops swapping chord sequences, pub gigs, Tennants Live - is about learning a trade, fitting in with the existing state of things, waiting for your chance. Sound experiment has no legitimacy here.

The result is that a group of people wishing to do anything different are forced back on their own resources. Communication with others has to be on the group's own terms: any concerts or recordings have to be organised themselves. Thus the group's self-understanding is of necessity both defensive and offensive in its affirmation of the choice made.

And so to Flux. For discussion of Flux requires an encounter both with their music itself (as represented on the cassettes in



question) and the printed texts accompanying the cassettes. And the latter is more off-putting than the former, as Flux's attitude displays a zeal reminiscent of nothing as much as "The Psychedelic Sounds of the Thirteenth Floor Elevators" (4)

The "Opening Doors" pamphlet consists largely of a discussion of music set in terms of the need to escape from the repetition inherent in systematised activity. The values of the Muso are thus repudiated. By implication, they would also reject the appropriation of elements of existing music through quotation and pastiche, practises accepted in all but the most abstract free improvisation.

The rejection of all musical experience based on "the memorial mind", where musical meaning is carried by differentiation of elements within a known system, leads towards an idea of absolute creation without history, without context. To "cast off outmoded and restricting standards of thinking" (5) is taken to require abandonment of the social (assumed to be pure oppression) and the individual (assumed to be purely an effect of social pressure).

In other texts, notably "Views from Beyond the Horizon Vol. 2" this leads to a quietism according to which true 'freedom' for the oppressed lies not in any individual or collective response to violation but instead merely tending their own gardens. All 'struggle', even the dignified refusal of an assigned role (their example is of opposition to bus discrimination in the USA), is denied, as mere reproduction of the system it opposes.

This is just offensive. However, as indicated above, activity has to be understood as emerging at a particular time and place, factors which organise the collective music-making and its range of possibilities. Like all social activities, that requires a shared myth; like many this one represents as embodying a general truth, and creating itself entirely without parentage. Self-representation as possessor of truths to which 'ordinary people' are blind is a recurring theme of subcultural identity, whether of the Beats of the 1950's, The Thirteenth Floor Elevators in 1966 or The Pop Group in 1978.

Flux apparently deny all influence on what they are doing. They would reject all the analogy, background or influences mentioned above and those which will be mentioned below. However, it is immediately obvious that Flux's music is based within the post-Punk time and category: in instrumentation, in mode of dissemination, in desire, in the manner in which 'speaking the truth' is staged.

The earlier of the two cassettes considered here, *In Flux*, was the creation of three people. Here, the fullness of sound was often provided by electric keyboards and delay systems. Several pieces (such as the title track) lie within the sound area opened by the German bands who first utilised such technology, in 1972-74. This is particularly so on the title track. At times

too, especially "Music", the concluding piece on Side 2, it recalls the worst tendency of such bands: that towards the sensory overload of chaotic freak-out instrumentals.

The more recent tape, *Opening Doors* involves twice the number of people. The music is still based on electric instruments, but a greater use of wind and percussion instruments allows each individual to leave more space to the other participants, giving the music more of a feeling of space.

Many tracks on *Opening Doors* are group improvisations meshing repeated motifs playing by each participant into a slowly-changing form. In the abandonment of basic song form, reliance on such use of repetition creates a structure which would otherwise be missing (especially because Flux, unlike the groups mentioned above, seem to place little stress on maintenance of common time/rhythm).

Several, such as "Beyond Clouds" and "Centre of Self", are more formal settings of lyrics. It would be interesting to know what performance principles Flux have evolved to deal with such a piece: is it performed again? Would the performance be a repetition? Or would the value of its performance be measured only in the extent of its transformation in new ways? Any improvising group situation is assailed by self-doubt and the possibility of collapse into the eternally-same. Some of the problems discussed in Flux's pamphlets are real enough in their effect on collective music-making. For example, a performance can be debilitated by an individual's unwillingness to discard a musical figure which has not been picked up by the other performers, hence the necessary stress on the collective over the individual.

The sustainance of a performing situation requires that the myth should be flexible enough to allow the discussion and experiment which nourish continuing growth. On the evidence of *Opening Doors*, whatever might be thought about that central myth, Flux are continuing to grow. A.D.

#### Notes

1. Flux tapes and magazines can be obtained from E. McDougall, 20 Fleuchar St, Dundee DD2 2LQ
2. For example, The Soft Machine's "Hope for Happiness" or the group passages on Captain Beefheart's song "Safe as Milk".
3. Some examples are the various transformations of a standard like "Smokestack Lightning", such as Kaleidoscope's "Bacon from Mars", or the extrapolation of Burt Bacharach's "My Little Red Book" into Pink Floyd's "Interstellar Overdrive".
4. Particularly in the lyrics of the song "Through the Rhythm"
5. From the sleeve notes to "Freak Out" by The Mothers of Invention (1966).

NOVUS HAVE THE FOLLOWING  
2 TAPES AVAILABLE PRICES  
INCLUDE POST AND PACKING

IN FLUX..... £1.3

OPENING DOORS.....£1.8

NOVUS also have a maga-  
zine entitled VIEWS  
FROM BEYOND THE HORIZON

vol 1: Poverty/Unemplo-  
ment/Music/Crea-  
tivity

vol 2: The Struggle in  
Life

vol 3: Love

vol 4: Awareness &  
Responsibility

vol 5: Belief & Com-  
munication

vol 6: Indoctrination

MAGAZINES ARE OBTAINA-  
BLE BY SENDING AN SAE:

E McDOUGALL:  
20 Fleuchar Street,  
Dundee DD2 2LQ  
Scotland.

M KANE:  
10 Victoria Chambers,  
Dundee DD1 5JN  
Scotland

# THE UNSEEN COLLECTION -

## The Variant Audio Cassette

William Clark

The works represented on this tape have been collected intermittently over a 9 month period. Most of the contact was made through my involvement in Transmission Gallery and of my own work in this area, and it was through a mutual interest with Variant that his audio tape has appeared. Some of the stuff fell into my lap, others were requested, so there was no rigorous theme or framework to pursue. As tapes arrived and more thought was given to the project, I discovered that there is a growing 'independent cassette underworld' which I had previously not been aware of, but one which is as varied as the Mail Art Network (1) - and indeed the two often interpenetrate. American magazines such as ND Magazine and Factsheet Five (2) exist purely to provide lists of tapes and magazines which stretch to hundreds of different titles, each one stranger than the last.

It is in the spirit of this 'Underground' that this modest collection is put together; not a particularly difficult task since the cassette offers a uniquely viable form of small scale production and distribution which is open to practically anyone. The intention is to make the tapes up to order, as requests come in through the post. Although re-production standards are low on this tape, the aim is to keep this project on the level of personal exchange (3): Mass Media and all it implies is an obstacle to a sociable and progressive form of creativity. Collaborative involvement not competitive alienation. Culture is not commerce.

David Ciattardinis, writing in High Performance No. 46 states that he would like to see artists develop the use of the cassette into a "sonic prop, a plotting device, a way to document and distribute the sonic essence of a performance". These aspects of documentation and distribution are important to some of the works in this collection and although some aspects of the works extracted from Performance or installation work lack their visual components, I do feel that they stand up on their own right. Although the tapes were collected at random as 't were, they do share certain approaches one of which being their stylistic device of reflecting and re-using natural and artificial sounds which are in our surroundings, the most

common of course being TV. and Radio. They represent a diversity of approach and treatment of source material, sometimes raw and blunt sometimes multi-layered. Although the collection does feature familiar 'musical elements', as a whole it spans a diversity somewhat at odds with current notions of what constitutes music or art.

Music does seem a slight force to oppose the brutalities of our age, yet it remains a force which becomes the talisman of our youth or/and the hymns sung at our death, it is the emblem of rebellion and conformity, it is both child's play and the life's work of our genius, a monument to history or a momentary indulgence. Lamentably, within our own society it has become a tool for social regulation rather than a tool for the liberation of the imagination and is used for little else other than the provision of the detestable spectacle of the pop star and the spiritual vacuum of Muzak.

The existence of the underground distribution network for cassettes represents a movement away from such forces of control and towards a notional form of independence. The idea of embodying an attitude of protest in musical form has a long history. Punk and the 'Indie Scene' both flirted with the act of decrying their bosses' stranglehold as a restrictive monopoly. These have their own antecedents in the emergence in the early 70's of labels such as Apple, Harvest, United Artists, Virgin, Island (Witchseason) and Dandelion, which aimed not just to represent the 'weirder bands' but provide an artistic freedom somewhat at odds with the Record Companies' purely exploitative and commercial aims. These labels provided a great deal of music which countered the creative depravity and ersatz emotion of the mainstreams' pandering to the dictates of the marketplace.(4)

It could be suggested that these antecedents are an influence on this collection, which aims to attest to the validity of those elements which have survived being judged in the light of the great deal of recuperation back into the dictates of the marketplace suffered by all of the above. How successful these earlier

forms of music were at 'leaving their mark' on what experimentation can achieve must be judged by the validity of their strategies to negate recuperation and to what extent these strategies remain worthwhile, utilizing and developing.

One can go back further into the history and development of the avant-garde of 'classical music' and its intermingling with the art of the 50's and 60's. These and other salient points are regularly discussed in the pages of Re-Records Quarterly, which remains an organisation committed to creating a network for international avant-garde music (5). Chris Cutler's own book 'File under Popular' (November Books 1984) is a radical analysis of musical forms and their development with particular emphasis on their means of production and reproduction and on their relationship with the ideology and expressive needs of particular social classes.

Cassette exchange is a de-centralized enough activity to contain many conflicting influences. The opening track on this collection is by the group Shelf Life; this and Howard Slater's and Richard Scott's work are perhaps the most rooted in the attitudes which inform Re Records. A philosophy of improvisation is the foremost principle of Slater's and Scott's work, the idea being to play and arrive at a state where you no longer need to play. Shelf Life share other aspects perhaps more readily identifiable in the American work on the collection principally the recycling of the styles of 'motivational tapes'. The Tape Beatles and Mark Bloch's "Maldoror" are openly under the influence of such avant-garde cross-overs that range from Spike Jones to John Cage. The other Americans, David Woodard's Pleccid and John Berdt's "Dialectical Immaterialism" are the strongest links with the Mail-art network in their home Country. Berdt's tape is part of the catalogue distributed by "Wide-mouth" tapes from Baltimore. These works are contemporary with the Huston based group of artists, called 'Culturecide' who produced the 14 track LP with no label identification called "Tacky souvenirs of pre-revolutionary America". on whose sleeve it notes "Home taping is Killing Music... so keep doing it". These



words share Culturecide's attack on "The big lie, the big dream, the big nauseating screaming sweating nightmare of Business America, Consumer America, Corporate America, Media America, Fascist America".

The term 'Industrial noise music' could perhaps be used to describe the contributions given by Klaus Maeck, Guts and Ivan Unwin. Maeck is the director of the film Decoder which features William Burroughs and members of the group Einstürzende Neumann. He has developed Burroughs' ideas which advocated turning the 'family tape recorder' into a 'diversive weapon' where the tape is used as a 'technical device to escalate a riot situation'. Burroughs stated that if demonstrators played recorded police whistles, gunshots and screams, etc. it would draw the Police off-scene and nullify their presence. This is what Maeck's tape is and what it has been used for.

Roger Sutherland, writing in ReRecords Vol. 2 no.3, states that 'electronic' music developed during the early 60s as a reaction against the effects of technological rationality which produced 'studio processed tape music'. Though I think we would all agree that this music has benefited from the technical advent of electronic sound generation and the emergence of recording techniques, if taken as a whole, this collection is somewhat at a distance from the music where it must always be linked to technological innovations. These artists are representative of a generation which has lost the illusion of a steady linear development in music and art. They shun the directives of art history and the avalanche of technical novelties (which are invariably offshoots from some development in military hardware). They seem to share a feel for discarded and siderial technology. This sensibility carries with it an attitude which invigorates experimentation. When one thinks of the results gained by musicians working with limited facilities (such as Link Wray punching holes in his speakers to get distortion) one feels that these experiments had a 'life-off' feel, a destructive quality of pushing things beyond the limits of their specifications. These unreproducible moments of intuitive leaping can only be preserved by being recorded. So much of the modern technological 'aids' for musicians resist such tampering and bluntly inform us that they have 'no user friendly parts'.

A response to technology and the Metropolis are notably demonstrated in Unwin's "Bite", "Chemical Plant" by Guts and Clara Zetkin's "Anti-Fascist Demonstration". Unwin's sound-work has had multiple uses and although the terms used to describe these uses change depending on context - it remains something other than what these terms conote - this 'something other' can only be expressed by using the oppressive sounds of technology. Yet paradoxically these

works remain the most human because they render a sense of our own vulnerability. The use of radio in a number of works present the human voice as at times a fragile broken smear, with emotion still breaking through in screams of protest. The human voice is also represented in the measured tones of the media or the static-ridden police/military communication. These works also contain an element similar to that of Science Fiction - the 'techno-fear' of Cyberpunk. An earlier relationship with technology is seen in Florian Cramer's Computer music which in her sound take on a hyper-technological sense of any human feel, yet maintains an organic structure. Gerlinde Wolf's "Wart, Transformation" takes a similar direction but introduces a more 'natural' play of tones. Her sound work is drawn from one of her poems which is accompanied by her own vocalizations (heard in the CD), which combine a 'natural' organic structure by the incorporation of the visual element of enlargement of microscopic phenomena of a cellular nature. One fundamental requirement of her work and that of the Puerty Institution is that sound is not to be reproduced in their exhibition environment which has been chosen to become part of the work. The Puerty Institution's untitled piece is taken from one of their performance/installations which draw on the cultural inscription of their site: a vast underground warehouse unused for fifty years, yet set for the cultural/commercial re-development symptomatic of contemporary Scottish Culture. A. Soma and Eve Libertine's contribution uses the associative meanings which sound so readily evokes. Vocalized emulations of emotional tones of speech form an on-going series of nominally poetic inclinations into a pattern which itself becomes an exploration of language and the structure of its sound. Eve's long piece refers this via the adoption and modulation of quotations which inform other quotations in both inflection and prose.

The collection only goes a little way to reflect the output of these artists and the interest in the artistic potential of sound work via the cassette.

## EDITORS' NOTES

1. Often the exchange of cassettes is the form that the correspondence takes (correspondence tapes and video where the tape is circulated to your contacts and they add a 'piece' then pass it on). There are innumerable audio exchange cells which rely on personal exchange and communication of its recipient correspondents, for example, Pete Horobin as part of his Data Project (in Scotland), DJ at Fomt (Ireland), and Rod Summers' VEC Audio Exchange (Holland).
2. ND Magazine is produced by Daniel Plunkett in Texas, USA. It contains a cross-section of material, interviews, reviews, by and with practitioners working in extended mediums: performance, sound, video, audio, music. It also contains an interesting list of contacts. Issues Nos. 9, 10 and 12 are available from Variant at £1 each (this includes postage). Factsheet Five is produced by Mike Gunderloy in New York, USA. This is a bulky listings magazine which literally contains 'lots of short reviews by people producing their own mags, tapes, videos, and other ephemeral material, from political stuff to flying saucer freaks to the society of Fruitcakes'. A lot of it is characteristically American, West Coast hippy stuff, but there are dozens of contacts to be made with regard to your particular concern.
3. Contact can be made with individual contributors if more material or exchange is desired.
4. The editors have much desire for independence - out of the Markets to make the best of the situation. A parallel could be made between these early 80s bands and such a post-punk label as Factory, which incredibly still manages to retain some kind of 'credibility' with music consumers.
- 5.

**Recommended Records** can be contacted at:  
R&R Megacorp, 19-23  
St. Saviour's Road,  
London SW2 5HP UK

MD



# **"The Unseen Collection" (the Variant Audio Cassette)**

a C90 tape featuring audio works by Shelf Life, Ivan Unwin, Klaus Maeke, The Tape Beatles, A. Soma and Eve Libertine, Clara Zetkin. Florian Cramer, Mark Bloch, The Puberty Institution, Guts, Gerlinde Salitin, John Berndt, David Woodard, Howard Slater and Richard Scott.

"neither popular, nor avant-garde, just different"

available firstly to subscribers, thereafter limited edition  
£2.50 : subscribers to magazine      £3.00 (non-subscribers)

initial duplication costs subsidized by Scottish Arts Council

---

## **SUBSCRIBE TO VARIANT**

and receive limited edition artists items  
and special offers on video and audio supplements

**£6 for 4 issues (individuals)**  
**£10 for 4 issues (institutions)**

# TRANSMISSION

: is an organisation constituted by a steering committee of eight - who administer the day to day running of the space and plan artistic policy..

: is centred in an artspace/gallery in the east end of Glasgow.

: is a non-profit making body - run voluntarily by practising local artists who share a commitment to the accessibility and growth of the visual arts in Glasgow and Scotland.

: was established in 1983 with the aim of exhibiting young Scottish artists. In 1985 Transmission's role was expanding with the intention of supporting progressive tendencies in contemporary art. Now in 1989 it has been re-located in a space which has been converted to include a large ground floor gallery and downstairs area with film/video room and a flexible multi purpose space.

Transmission's aims encompass.....

- : to provide a platform in Scotland for the presentation of experimental/time based work including film, video, installation, performance, live music/sound events.
- : the public presentation of art in its social, political and cultural context.
- : to introduce the wider community to a more broad based approach to the visual arts.
- : to encourage artists to initiate schemes and/or proposals using the gallery as a contact point and/or organisation centre.
- : to establish a focus for the discussion and critical appreciation of the different artistic and ideological approaches to art.
- : to promote diversity in working methods and practise.
- : to create links within other disciplines, with activities such as writers events and the creation of an autonomous political forum.
- : to develop a support network from the membership of artists and non-artists.
- : to maintain/develop contact with other artist run spaces/organisations and other cultural workers.
- : to promote and develop an exchange programme on a national and international level.
- : to aid distribution of small press/artist produced magazines and books.

Transmission welcomes proposals from the young and from the unestablished artist, also of work of a more challenging nature which would not otherwise be shown or represented through the commercially orientated or established art institution.

Transmission 28 King Street, Trongate, Glasgow G1 5QP  
041 552 4013. Subsidised by the Scottish Arts Council.